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F O C H  
The Man of Orleans

BY LIDDELL HART

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FOCH  
The Man of Orleans

BY  
LIDDELL HART

IN TWO VOLUMES: VOLUME ONE



PENGUIN BOOKS LIMITED  
HARMONDSWORTH, MIDDLESEX, ENGLAND

First published 1931  
Published in Penguin Books SEPTEMBER 1937  
Second Impression OCTOBER 1937

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY  
HAZELL, WATSON & VINEY, LTD., LONDON AND AYLESBURY

TO  
FOUR GOOD FRIENDS  
E. D. S. E. G. H. F. A. P. F. B. A.  
FOR GOOD TURNS



## PREFACE

THIS book does not pretend to be an "official" biography, although General Weygand has generously helped me in collecting and checking facts, as well as in giving me his impressions on certain issues. The more tribute is due to him because he has not sought in any way to influence my judgment. As he has refrained from imposing any conditions in return for his aid, it is all the more just that I should make it clear that he has no responsibility for the conclusions reached in this book.

I realise that these conclusions may impair the popular conception of Marshal Foch's achievement, if not of his spirit. No one will regret such an effect more than I do. For it has been with reluctance that I have yielded my own original conception in face of the facts laid bare by research into the history of the war. If I may appear critical, I can only say that I have kept my criticism on a tight rein while giving the facts free rein—as true history requires. Such criticisms as I make are implicit in the facts, which cannot be burked. And I have purposely restrained criticism because of a feeling that the indefinable effect of Foch's spirit endowed his actions with more effect than the facts convey.

It is my strongest hope that the book will in no sense be regarded as an "attack" on, or "exposure" of, Foch. It certainly brings out his too absorbing devotion to the offensive in the theory and practice of war—and the grave consequences not only to France but to her Allies. But, this question apart, the book is really an analysis of the limitations which high command suffered under the conditions of the World War. The effective influence of the higher commander was thwarted by the difficulty not only of knowing the facts of the situation but of knowing them in time to take action which fitted them—before they had changed.

As for my criticism of the offensive doctrine, it does not exceed the way Marshal Foch himself castigates that "too exclusive passion for the offensive and the useless repulses and cruel losses thereby caused." My supplement has merely been to trace Marshal Foch's own influence in fostering that too "exclusive passion" which caused such "useless repulses and cruel losses"—not only in 1914 but later.

B. H. L. H.



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## CHAPTER I

### TWO NAPOLEONS

It was the month of October in the year 1851. A few months earlier Queen Victoria, assisted by the Prince Consort, had gone to Hyde Park to open the Great Exhibition which was to inaugurate a Golden Age of international peace and prosperity. A Crystal Palace was perhaps an insecure abode for the spirit of peace. Even at its opening, clouds were gathering beyond the Channel.

In France, three years earlier, the attempt to withdraw a dole which had aggravated the unemployed problem had led to the "June Days" of insurrection and its suppression, in which the Socialist party was crushed from above and the Republic sapped from below. The Duke of Wellington, in comment, wrote: "France needs a Napoleon!" She had not long to wait. Unlimited democracy paved the way to the revival of unlimited monarchy. The new constitution of November, 1848, combined the grant of universal suffrage with the delegation of power to a president who should be emperor in all but name. The newly enfranchised masses gave their vote to the name of Napoleon, as borne by one who was both the nephew and the adopted grandson of the first Emperor. It was a quick change from ridiculed adventurer to socialistic saviour of the people. Carried to power by his unlimited flattery of the masses and their unlimited faith in a legend, Louis Napoleon worked to convert the presidency into a permanency, and to add the name of emperor. The Assembly feebly strove to resist the tide, but merely precipitated its own submergence. The autumn of 1851 saw the gathering of forces against an Assembly which could dispose of none, and at last on "the night of Austerlitz" the *coup d'état* was carried out.

It came exactly two months after another night of "internal" crisis produced by a humble bearer of the same name. History may note the coincidence; contemporary opinion would hardly have ascribed significance to it. For it was the commonest of all human crises—that which precedes the delivery of a child. And

it took place on a bed that lay obscurely in an alcove at the back of a room which was indistinguishable from several million such rooms in the bourgeois homes of France. The room had two shuttered windows overlooking the street and was one of eight in an apartment above a baker's shop, No. 43, Rue St. Louis, in the little Pyrenean town of Tarbes. The apartment belonged to Monsieur Napoléon Foch, who in compensation for a small salary bore the high-sounding title of Secretary-General of the Prefecture of the Hautes Pyrénées.

Only function, and not family ties, linked him to Tarbes. His family came from the village of Valentine in the neighbouring department of the Haute Garonne. If his child would thus be an exotic plant, the fact was a fulfilment of heredity. And like plants the Fochs, although occasionally transplanted, were quick to take root and flourish in new surroundings. Here heredity cast its shadow across the future.

It is certain that the family of Foch had been rooted in Valentine since the seventeenth century, for a Jean Foch died there in 1693. There is a dubious tradition that they had come south from Alsace during the wars of religion. It is more likely that their move was a shorter one—that they came from Ariège and sprang from the old Celtiberian stock of that adjacent Pyrenean district.

Fancy fanned by fame has played round the derivation of the name of the Fochs. A plausible suggestion is that originally they adopted the name of their feudal lords, the Counts of Foix, for this in the local patois is pronounced "Fouch." Its original derivation may be from the Latin words *focus* or *fodium*. Symbolically, either has a delightful fitness. The "fire" of martial leadership or the "fire" which consumes the enemy.<sup>1</sup> The "fosse" or ditch which bars the enemy's path.

Those who wish can even find a mystical significance in the arms of Valentine, once an important town. For they are unique in the provinces of France as a link with the arms of the old kingdom of France: the fleurs-de-lis surmounted by a crown, upheld by a lion, and having two angels as supporters. The crown—is it the forecast of November 11, 1918? The lion—is it merely the emblem of courage, or the symbol of Britain's

<sup>1</sup> This etymology is strengthened by the fact that in the dialect of the district fire is called "fioch."

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alliance? The angel—what is it? Perhaps a spiritualised version of the American eagle. Perhaps the guardian angel whose services were so often needed by, and liberally rendered to, the child about to be born.

But when one passes from fancy to history, one must confess that, in his ancestry, romance ends with the name. Originally manufacturers of paper, since the days of Louis XIV the Fochs had been wool merchants, although finding an outlet for adventure and a test of hardihood in perilous trading journeys across the mountains into Spain. This experience strengthened their religious faith; it also gave them a habit of collecting Christian names of Spanish origin and religious flavour for their offspring. A temporary reaction came with the Dominique Foch, who was not only head of the family but head of the commune of Valentine in the days of the Revolution. Before it, he shared the honours with his priest brother in a brisk internal struggle of families for the dominating rôle in the township.

During the Revolution, his brother and his rivals alike receded into the background, and left to him the onerous leadership for which he showed so much aptitude. Foremost in council, he was only one degree behind as a man of action. For at the outset he became second-captain of the second company of the National Guard at Valentine. And it is perhaps significant of a new-born military enthusiasm that on paper he signed himself *capitaine conseiller*. There is even a tradition that, anticipating Bonaparte, he dared, while the Terror was at its height, to disperse a riotous rabble, and that he forcibly maintained a reign of order in Valentine.

The time of Bonaparte's rise to power in France saw the crowning of Dominique Foch's power in Valentine by his assumption of the office of Mayor. His business flourished also, and his new dignity was celebrated by building a new house, with a fine doorway, seven windows on the front, and a large salon decorated, but scarcely adorned, with panels painted by a local artist whose gifts were perhaps numbed by such flights of luxury and the luxury of having a patron.

Dominique Foch was equally active in another line. In fourteen years of marriage he had eight children. He did not live to see Napoleon crowned Emperor, but in happy anticipation of that event he gave, in 1803, his latest-born son the name

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of Napoléon. As a further token of his own incompletely satisfied martial ambition and militant patriotism, he borrowed for his son also the Christian name of Bertrand du Guesclin. Then, a year later, prematurely worn out by his variety of activities, he died.

But whatever martial dreams Dominique Foch had indulged in on behalf of his son were to be frustrated. Waterloo came too soon for their fulfilment. So Napoléon Foch turned instead to carve a career for himself in that army of civil servants which was to become almost as numerous as the Grande Armée, if less bountiful in batons. The traditional religious bent of his family was strengthened in him when he was for a time posted to Lourdes, even then a place of pilgrimage, although the peasant girl Bernadette was not to have her vision of the Virgin until a generation later. He had already, in 1832, brought a military tradition into the ancestry of his offspring by marrying Marie-Jacqueline-Sophie, daughter of the Chevalier Dupré of Argèles.

Dupré himself had left home at sixteen to enlist in the Chasseurs of Dauphiné, a picked corps of the old Royal Army. The Revolutionary wars gave him the opportunity to win distinction and a commission in the Army of Italy. After Austerlitz, he gained his captaincy, and although his third wound, received in the Spanish Campaign of 1809, ended his active campaigning, he was compensated in 1812 by appointment to the Legion of Honour. To support his new dignity, he adopted a coat of arms which embraced a lion rampant, a drawn sword, and a Gallic cock—prophetic symbolism again.

With the restoration of the Bourbons he had little else than dignity to support him. The task of living was not made easier by his generosity both to old comrades and to any others who would listen to his recital of past glories. As he was decisively master in his own house, wifely sighs were of no avail to check this generosity, but its consequences contributed to make him accept the more readily an offer from his son-in-law. For Napoléon Foch, on being appointed to Tarbes in 1849, invited his wife's parents to leave their home and share his. Only an understanding of the time and of his nationality can make this son-in-law's wish comprehensible to us.

But it had the result that the "last post" of this old soldier of Napoleon coincided with the "reveille" of a young



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soldier who in turn was to take his last post at the side of Napoleon.

It was the 2nd of October, 1851, when, at ten o'clock in the evening, a third child and second son was born to Napoléon Foch, and given the name of Ferdinand. His arrival had been preceded by that of a sister and a brother. Eugénie was destined to remain unmarried and the guardian of the *lares* at Valentine, outliving even her long-lived brothers; Gabriel became a lawyer and practised at Tarbes. After Ferdinand came Germain, who, entering the Jesuit order, was the indirect means of jeopardising the career of a brother he dearly loved.

Religion and Napoleon seem to have been the strongest influences in the childhood of Ferdinand. He was only six years old when Bernadette Soubirous had the first of her visions in the grotto of Lourdes. More enthusiastically than the prefect, more readily even than the Church, Napoléon Foch accepted the authenticity of the revelation. He exerted his power of persuasion, and his wife her prayers, in support of Bernadette. The experience of this time of great spiritual emotion not only strengthened the devoutness of the parents, but moulded the impressionable minds of their children. Nor was it unique.

Indeed, the parents' Catholicity seems to have been of such generous proportions that for their fervour local patriotism was not enough. Valentine had more than its share of miraculous associations until they fell into the shadow cast by the Virgin of Lourdes. The Chapel of the Virgin at the Bout du Puy had been a pre-Bernadette centre of pilgrimage, while in Valentine itself Pontius Pilate was born, and his house could still be pointed out to any who doubted the story. Perhaps we may trace some of the indelible impressions of childhood in the course of Ferdinand's later life.

The Napoleonic influence developed somewhat later. Ferdinand was a baby in arms of three months when his grandfather died suddenly. Old Guard and New Guard had barely time to present "arms." It is true that the youngster had another Napoleonic relic left—his great-aunt, the widow of General Nogues, who had risen to that rank after enlisting as a drummer boy in the old Royal Army. Aunt "Ni," as the children called her, was never tired of recounting the glories of Napoleon, of fighting his battles over again. And, being extremely deaf, her

anecdotalage was not easily interrupted. Moreover, the habit of living in the past had induced a confusion with the present, perhaps accentuated by the recent dawn of another Napoleon and a second Empire. Thus she was apt to talk to the "little Napoleons"—as the Foch children were known in Valentine—as if not only she but they had actually shared in the events of the First Empire. "You remember, Ferdinand, the ball that *He* gave that evening," or "You remember, Ferdinand, that on the eve of Austerlitz . . ." To which, with the uncompromising logic of childhood, the small boy would as regularly reply: "No, Aunt, because I was not born." It was perhaps more to his immediate taste when he was allowed one evening, for a fête, to don the General's old uniform. Nevertheless, many drops of this Napoleonic shower inevitably percolated the susceptible child mind, and family anecdotes produced a desire for knowledge slightly more reliable.

Those who know the appetite of the studious small boy for curiously solid fare will not be surprised to learn that the massive volumes of Thiers' *The Consulate and the Empire* composed from early years his favourite diet. He himself used to say later: "At eleven I knew the battles of Marengo and Trafalgar off by heart." The emphasis on Trafalgar is surprising, and appears the more so in view of the fact that fifty years later, if we are to believe his friend Sir Henry Wilson, he agreed with Joffre in rating the British Navy as not worth "one bayonet." But the literary appetite of boyhood is usually greater than its power of assimilation. Knowledge comes, but wisdom tarries.

The Napoleonic influence was early signalled by a coincidence. When ten years old, the boy had gone to the *lycée* at Tarbes, where, after a promising first year, he had dropped abruptly out of the prize-list in his second year. Then Napoléon Foch was transferred to the post of public paymaster at Rodez, and in consequence his sons had a change of school. It was at the *lycée* at Rodez that Ferdinand's future career was determined. For in words strangely parallel to those applied to Napoleon Bonaparte at the same age, his mathematical master, Almeras by name, uttered the verdict: "A geometrical mind. He has in him the making of a polytechnician."

Henceforth the boy had a goal, all the better for him because its pursuit was hard. For the Polytechnique was, and is, not

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merely a cadet college for the artillery and engineers, but the gateway to most of the higher posts in the Civil Service.

The task of preparation suffered interruption. When Ferdinand was fifteen, his father's post was suppressed, and while he was waiting for another appointment his son was sent for a year to the seminary at Polignan. But the priests were painstaking teachers and encouraged the boy to specialise in mathematics. Moreover, the other students were mostly older, preparing for the priesthood. As he said later: "They swotted all the time. . . . So to keep pace with them I had to pull a stiff oar. That's what I learnt best there—to pull a stiff oar."

The benefit was seen when, on his father taking up the office of Collector of Taxes at St. Etienne, he was sent with Gabriel to the Jesuit College of St. Michael at that place. The young Fochs, now competing with class-mates of their own age, gained a passing unpopularity by making a clearance of the prizes. But the Pyrenees were close enough to preserve them from priggishness, and at least in their holidays, spent at Valentine, they led an open-air life. Best of all was the fun of accompanying their father when he went shooting or fishing.

If a story of this period be true it reveals more clearly than any how indelible was by now the impression of Napoleon on the mind of Ferdinand. For it is said that before one such expedition his father found him seated on the floor poring over books on Napoleon to discover whether he also had gone fishing in his school holidays. One can only say that, if the story is a later invention, it is so apt that it had to be invented.

These field excursions became the more enchanting in retrospect when he missed them by going further afield. For in 1869, after taking his *baccalauréat*, he was sent to the Jesuit College of St. Clement at Metz, which had a notable record of successes in the entrance examination for the Polytechnique. "I remained six months without seeing the sun. I could not get used to it! I came from the Pyrenees. . . . Later I became acclimatised. But it was hard. Still, I had come to work, and there they worked hard. . . ."

What impression did the thick-set young Pyrenean, fair of hair and square of chin, make on his schoolfellows? He attracted them by his contrasts. "Impulsive yet pensive." His strong and sturdy build offset by a rather gentle look in his

blue eyes. Shy, yet anxious to be friendly. Sparing of words, but already apt to express himself vigorously in gesture. He walked about with his eyes on the ground, but looked anyone full in the face when talking. Personality prevailed over popularity when, in his second year, he was voted by his school-fellows the "grand prix de sagesse."

The coming of war in 1870 interrupted his sure progress towards the Polytechnique. The armies had mobilised and were groping towards each other while Foch was sitting for his written tests in the examination room at Metz. The excitement was too high for concentration, and thoughts wandered from the paper to the battlefield so close at hand. Yet the subject set for the essay stuck in Foch's mind—"Develop this thought of Kléber's—'Youth must train its faculties.'" For what? He was soon to find the answer. He could go to the Polytechnique to become a soldier, not a civil servant.

He was a soldier earlier even than he dreamt that hot August day. For the morrow brought news of MacMahon's defeat at Wörth on the 6th, and produced a general retirement of the French armies to the Moselle. Foch later recalled how—"In front of the Prefecture I saw Napoleon III. The square was full of carriages, and in a barouche the Emperor was starting off, ill, tired and depressed. . . . The Grand Hotel was being used as headquarters. Bazaine's staff was installed there in complete chaos. The general was playing billiards." If hearsay had become mixed with this recollection it did not affect the hard impression made upon the young man's mind. And it was reinforced by the experiences of the following days.

The College closed, and the students dispersed, amid the rumblings of disaster. A panic-stricken crowd seethed on the platform when Foch caught the train for Paris. In his compartment was an old peasant woman, a refugee from Strasbourg, whose sole luggage was a pot of geranium. Once back at St. Etienne, he could not bear its restful remoteness, and, with his father's permission, he enlisted as a private soldier in the 4th Regiment of the Line. But the knowledge that qualified him for the Polytechnique was no qualification for a fighting man, and thus he had to undergo, first at the St. Etienne dépôt, and then in camp at Chalon-sur-Saône, the dull but essential process of learning to drill and to handle arms.

The process was duller and more prolonged than it need have been, because the Government of National Defence had to depend on generals "deficient in intelligence and enthusiasm. They were old men brought up in the old school and were persuaded . . . that soldiers and armies were made gradually." As Foch saw, and history shows, their futility forfeited the excellent chance that Gambetta had of inducing the Germans to concede a satisfactory peace rather than be drawn, for their part, into the futility of a prolonged war.

The horizon of the French generals, however, was limited by the parade ground. And, as one consequence, the young soldier Foch was fated, like so large a part of the newly raised levies of France, to see the issue settled and the war ended before he had fired a shot. More fortunate, in his eyes at least, was his close friend at St. Clement's, Rivet de Chaussepierre, who was given a commission and fell in action. Foch is reported to have said, on hearing the news: "A glorious death, and one to be envied. You shall be revenged."

Although he himself saw no fighting, he was fortunate to survive. "We had scarcely enlisted before we were sent into training camps, where we slept under canvas. We had a terrible winter and died like flies. Why were we treated so stupidly? Because the old-timers believed that nothing but the hardest training and privations, and sleeping under canvas, could form soldiers—which is ridiculous."

Foch's short experience was not without compensation. From what he saw, and still more from what he heard, he learnt an invaluable negative lesson. The inherent failing and natural tendency of armies was revealed to him at an age when he could profit by it. "The leaders knew how to make war as well as an elephant knows how to climb a ladder. The colonel? Good, at most, for the command of a company. And even more! For walking in front, and crying 'Forward!' with a cigar in his mouth. They followed him. Brave? Certainly they were brave. Very! But bravery is quite beside the point. They were soldiers, fine soldiers, but not leaders. What is required of leaders is that they should command. . . . They were not stupid, they were intelligent. . . . Very genteel, plenty of go, plenty of good humour. But it is not enough to strut about and march past in brilliant style."

Thus the young soldier had his eyes opened to the need for education. And more, for thought. Still more for a wider horizon. The question for him was how to apply the lesson. The question of history is how far he remembered it when his own test in command came. How far was his light to be dimmed by the forty-odd years of peace-time soldiering which were to follow? Would he fall into the rut of conventional thought?

It was at least with a fertilising experience that after his discharge in March, 1871, he went back to his mathematical studies at Metz, with not merely the Polytechnique but beyond it the Army as his goal. And beyond the Army there was now also a goal.

## CHAPTER II

### THE STAMP OF DESTINY

THE crash of a salvo shook the windows of the classroom. Fired by German gunners. The forts of Metz were announcing to the occupied city that its permanent bondage was decreed.

For it was the evening of May 11th, 1871, and away to the eastward in the Swan Hotel at Frankfort-on-Main, Prince Bismarck and Jules Favre a few hours earlier had affixed their signatures to a momentous piece of paper. Henceforth Alsace and much of Lorraine were part of the new German Empire.

In the classroom at St. Clement's the message of the guns needed no interpreter. The boys jumped to their feet. The superintendent, rising more soberly, cried, "Mes enfants!"—and then, unable to say more, lowered his head and joined his hands as if in prayer. The memory of that terrible moment was never effaced from the minds of the students. Least of all from that of Foch.

There were not lacking other incidents to engrave it more deeply. A tedious three days' journey, as no trains were running by night, had brought Foch back to the occupied city

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to find that German troops were even billeted in the College. Flushed with victory, these were not slow to assert the authority of the conqueror, and their pin-pricks were the more resented by sensitive youths because they felt their powerlessness to retaliate. But not always. For Foch himself told the story how—"In the courtyard where we used to play one of the Pomeranians who kept guard over us took our ball on the pretence that we had thrown it into a forbidden area. Then I collected all my friends, we dashed to the assault and recaptured our ball from him!" Neither Foch nor history relates whether this assault brought retribution. Perhaps the Germans made more allowance for youth than youth was in the mood to make for them.

Patriotic pride was galled afresh when Foch went to Nancy to sit for his Polytechnique entrance examination. For the ancient capital of Lorraine was still occupied, until the war indemnity should be paid, by the troops of General Manteuffel, and Foch had to suffer the mortification of listening to German Army bands each day when he came out of the examination room where he was competing for entry to the French Army.

Perchance this distraction affected his concentration, for although he gained a place in the Polytechnique entry, that place—76th on a list of 140—was not so high as his work at Metz had promised. Still more probable it was owing to the accompaniment that his ear, though always sensitive to religious music, became so patriotically deaf that half a century later he rebuffed the suggestion that he was a lover of Wagner with the assertion that the only music he knew was the first two bars of the Madelon.

It is certainly clear that the strains of the German military music in 1871 made a deeper than aural impression, for when he took over command at Nancy forty-two years later he cleansed his memory with fanfares—fanfares that heralded the coming of a greater revenge. And this was to be the fulfilment of a life's aim to which he had dedicated himself before leaving St. Clement's. According to an anecdote, he then declared: "Alsace-Lorraine must be regained; France must never again be defeated; I must be one of her liberators." It is natural to read in these words that were fulfilled a prophetic sense of personal fulfilment. If so, we might suspect that they had been fitted to the facts. But they do not really suggest more than the

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natural vow of any young patriot to play a part in restoring his country's loss. And their virtue lies not in the speaker's clairvoyance but in his steady application to the task of fitting himself to be ready for an opportunity that might, or might not, come.

On November 5th, 1871, the new class assembled at the Polytechnique, then housed in the buildings of the former College of Navarre. Thereby arose a coincidence which may have seemed to Foch a welcome and an omen. For over the portal was engraved the same motto, in Latin, that had adorned the door of his first school at Tarbes—"May this house stand until the ant has drunk the waters of the sea, and the tortoise has made the circuit of the earth." But, in truth, it was fortunate to be still standing when Foch arrived, soon after the Commune had been suppressed. The buildings had been occupied by the Communists, and stormed by a battalion of chasseurs, whose abrupt entry had allowed the occupants time only to flee by way of the chemical laboratory, and had thus averted any attempt to set the buildings on fire. Even so, they had suffered from the poor shooting of the Père-Lachaise batteries bombarding the Panthéon. They had also witnessed the death of some of the Communists, summarily executed there during those bloody days when the Army had exacted its revenge from the mob to the tune of over twenty thousand death-rattles. A revenge that in its excess was perhaps an outlet for the mortification inflicted by a foreign foe.

The shame of defeat in the field, the bitter memory of civil strife—engraved by bullets on the very walls of the Polytechnique—lay heavy on the minds of the 1871 class of students. It could be momentarily eclipsed by the brightness which came on first donning uniform. Even in old age Foch could recall the thrill of his first walk thus attired: "We walked about tapping the ground with our heels, and we held ourselves very straight as if something had changed in the aspect of the universe." But for a time the school which had been a mortuary retained the sombre air of a monastery.

As there were no entertainments to relieve the steady grind of work in an institution where recreation has always played a minor part, Foch was incited to obtain in the library such relief as the long hours of study permitted. There he made fresh inroads into



Napoleonic literature and discovered the further charm of historical romance in the works of Walter Scott. But, whatever his acquired zeal and industry, the ebullient spirits of a Gascon youth found an irksome repression in such an atmosphere. He eagerly seized a chance of release which came at the end of his first year, when his position on the list had risen to forty-seventh.

There was a call for Polytechnicians to enter the Ecole d'Application, the artillery training school at Fontainebleau. The reorganisation of the Army was in progress, and there was a shortage of officers, especially in the artillery and engineers. Disaster had at least revealed the deficiencies of, and in, these technical arms.

His application accepted, he was posted to the school in February, 1873. The newly commissioned officer of artillery—Napoleon's own arm—had thus a fresh immersion in Napoleonic memories. A youth so susceptible could not fail to be thrilled and inspired by the shades of Fontainebleau. Long rides through the forest had a practical purpose but also an appeal to the mystical element in him. The duality was characteristic. Eighteen months later he finished his course, passing out third. His high place gave him choice of regiment and station; he went to the 24th Regiment of Artillery at Tarbes. The return to his actual birthplace may have been a coincidence, but the choice of locality was inspired by his desire "to work and dream in the shadow of the mountains."

After two years of regimental routine, lightened by the sense of sharing in a patriotic reconstruction, he left Tarbes in 1876 for the Cavalry School at Saumur to perfect his horsemanship. He did so. He even acquired for life the cavalryman's walk. His taste in mounts, too, was as fine as his seat on a horse, and it was reflected later in the fact that his supreme tribute to any officer became: "He's a thoroughbred."

But his dominant motive seems to have been less a pure delight in riding than the practical one of fitting himself for the future, and he turned pleasure into work so thoroughly that his initial zest was deadened by satiety. In the twilight of life, confessing that he had given up equitation, he wryly remarked: "For forty years, less by conviction than by duty, because it was a military article of faith that in war one should always be on horseback, I forced myself to ride every morning, winter and summer, what-

ever the weather, from half-past seven to half-past nine. And, look at the irony of things! The war breaks out, it lasts four years, even a little longer, and not once during those four years, save for ceremonial parades, did I have occasion to show my horsemanship. In fact, I ceased to handle a horse from the day I began to handle troops in war. What a joke!"

More purposeful than ever, the Foch of Saumur days had not changed but merely matured. His fellows at Saumur noted that he was still the old mixture of impulsiveness and reserve, of energy and restraint. He still walked about with his head down, deep in his thoughts. In finding expression for them the training of his muscles at Saumur would have as much influence as the training of his mind at the Polytechnique.

In September, 1878, he was promoted captain—the shortage of officers bringing him unusually quick advancement. And from Saumur he was posted to the 10th Regiment of Artillery, stationed at Rennes. A generation was to pass before the Dreyfus court-martial brought ill-fame to this Breton town. To Foch it brought happiness in double measure. For he so fell in love with Brittany that he became its son by adoption. And the adoption was the surer, the tie the stronger, because he fell in love with a daughter of Brittany.

Celt and Catholic himself, he was the more readily responsive to the charm of a province that was by tradition, religion, and atmosphere a ready-made home for his spirit. And at Rennes he first met Julie Bienvenue—how amazingly apt a name! She was the only and orphan child of a lawyer, sprung from a family as religious and solidly bourgeois as Foch's own. As Celtic also, with a vein both of culture and of mysticism running through the bourgeois rock. Like her future husband, Julie Bienvenue had a prosaic civil tradition on her father's side—even though his father had flavoured it with poetry and ecclesiastical history—while through her maternal grandfather, who brought her up at St. Brieuc, she was of the blood of Godart Rochard, whose adventures in the armies of Napoleon surpassed those of the Chevalier Dupré.

Foch did not marry in haste. In 1880 he left Rennes for Paris, on appointment to the Artillery Committee at the Ministry of War. There it fell to him to write an official handbook for non-commissioned officers of artillery on the theory of their craft.

Despite the post-war changes in material and in methods of fire, the authorities, characteristically, had overlooked the need to provide such guidance until aroused by the success of an unofficial handbook. Then the Artillery Committee decided that an official book was necessary and appointed Captain Foch to prepare it. Realising that it would kill the sale of the unofficial book, whose author was an old comrade of Polytechnique days, Foch both warned him and retarded the progress of his own book, in order that the unofficial book might have a chance to sell out before the other was published.

This official literary experience does not seem to have inspired him with respect for official literary productions, for which he had always a caustic comment in later life. But it at least affected the way he wrote. From that period dates his bold yet careful script, its copybook uniformity of outline relieved by the expressively emphatic pressure on the downstrokes. He himself related its evolution thus: "General Minot, a real eighteenth-century general, said to me: 'You write very badly; one can't read it.' I wrote like nothing on earth. At the Ecole Polytechnique they write on their knees; in the lecture-rooms there are no tables. One develops bad habits. And, besides, while a lieutenant I had not often handled the pen. Then I took to big pens, Rumboldtes, and I began to write a very large hand. I was obliged to form my letters. I practised hard. Six months later the General said to me: 'You are beginning to be legible!' And, further, that forced me to write slowly. Then one has time to reflect, to think of what one means. . . ."

Foch perhaps overrated the benefits. With slow writing the pen controls the mind, rather than the mind controlling the pen. It tends to a jerkiness of thought and to breaks in the thread of thought. Hence perhaps the inconclusive ideas and contradictions to be found in Foch's later books on war. And to the preciseness with which he formed his letters and dotted his "i's" can perhaps be traced that lack of precision which is often noticeable in his thought.

In 1881 Foch was posted to the 9th Regiment of Artillery. His leaves were spent in Brittany, but not for another two years, when he was thirty-two, did he commit himself to marriage. His entry into the wedded state took place on the twelfth anniversary of his entry into the Polytechnique. Lovers of coincidence may

note that the most eventful dates of his life were to fall within the twelve days from October 31st to November 11th. His marriage was one of solid affection rather than sudden passion, and was not allowed to interfere with work. Even when he took leave from duty to come back with his wife to St. Brieuc he rose regularly at seven o'clock, went out riding and came back to study.

For his immediate goal was now the French Staff College, the Ecole Supérieure de Guerre, situated in Paris. He gained admission in 1885 and passed out fourth on the list two years later. When, a decade later, Foch himself became a teacher, he said: "It was not until 1882-83 that the subject of war was taught in France on a rational and practical basis, and that despite the fact that our school dated from 1876. The fact of putting an inscription on the walls had not sufficed to create the school of War." Thus in his opinion it would seem that he had entered the Ecole de Guerre at the right time, even though right by a narrow margin of time. Perhaps a later generation may deem that he was too early. For what he learnt there inevitably influenced his own teaching later, while those he taught were the men who really formulated the final pre-1914 plan and doctrine of war. "By their fruits ye shall know them." History suggests that it is unfair to judge any prophet by the dogmas of his disciples, but history has made it possible to judge Foch by his own acts—his own practice of his theories.

From the Ecole de Guerre, in November, 1887, Foch was appointed on probation to the staff of the XVI Army Corps at Montpellier. This spot, so close to the Mediterranean, would also have been within conveniently close reach of his parental home—if that home had not become desolate. For his father had died in 1880, owing, in the son's opinion, to a long habit of insufficient nourishment. As Napoléon Foch was seventy-seven at the time of his "premature" decease, it is evident that the family had high standards of longevity!

Ferdinand's mother died a few weeks after his wedding, and at Valentine only his sister Eugénie remained to hold the ends of the broken link. For Ferdinand its breaking helped towards a deeper breach with the past—the transfer to Brittany of his permanent home. In Brittany he and his wife usually spent their holidays, and the very fact that he came there to find rest and

change from dusty garrison towns and stuffy offices helped to rivet the Armorican spell more firmly on his soul. Some years later, about 1895, he acknowledged his final surrender to it by purchasing a small estate called Treufeunteuniou near Ploujean.

He himself gave another and simpler reason for his action: "My wife was born in Brittany, and husbands, in contradiction to the law, often—in fact, nearly always—follow their wives. Nine times out of ten they show good sense in doing so. That is why I bought my little place."

Within close reach of the northern coast, Ploujean lies on the outskirts of historic Morlaix, where the gabled wooden houses with their outside staircases and inner courts preserve the air of medieval romance. The severe outline of the house, stone built and oblong, was softened by the clinging tendrils of vine and honeysuckle, as well as by its frame of trees, relics of the great forest of Broceliande. The estate covered some seventy acres, in part the home of hare and partridge. So, for Foch, it provided an abundant chance to enjoy his favourite recreation, to develop that form of skill in which he most excelled, and to draw upon a favourite source of metaphor for his military lectures.

A landmark in his domestic life, the purchase of this Breton home was sequel to a landmark, perhaps the greatest, in his career. Each opened a new horizon. From 1895 onwards Foch became a factor in, and a growing influence on, the course of world history.

But before this landmark is reached there is a gap in his record to fill. After his period of probation he had been posted to the staff of the 31st Division, which formed part of the XVI Army Corps at Montpellier. But he was destined to be brought back soon from the circumference to the centre of the Army by the magnetic effect of the impression he had made earlier on those he had served. In August, 1890, he was summoned to the Ministry of War, to join the Third Bureau of the General Staff—the innermost sanctuary of the General Staff, as it is the "Operations" branch and deals with war plans. We have his own evidence as to the impression it made upon him and the impression he made upon its personnel. "At that time they were still rather old-fashioned. I was regarded as a revolutionary there; I wrote brief orders, I did not fill up all the pigeon-holes;

they criticised me. I replied: 'Have I put in every point?' 'Yes!' 'Well, what more do you want?'"

That Foch had such a bad character at the age of forty is good testimony to his moral quality, showing that he still possessed one of the two attributes essential in both the leader and the teacher. An army is an institution not merely conservative but retrogressive by nature. It has such natural resistance to progress that it is always ensured against the danger of being pushed ahead too fast. Far worse and more certain, as history abundantly testifies, is the danger of it slipping backward. Like a man pushing a barrow up a hill, if the soldier ceases to push, the military machine will run back and crush him. To be deemed a revolutionary in the army is merely an indication of vitality, the pulse-beat which shows that the mind is still alive. When a soldier ceases to be a revolutionary, it is a sure sign that he has become a mummy. If Foch at forty preserved the urge to progress, the fact established his moral fitness for the influence he was soon to exercise. His mental fitness for it would depend on his range of vision and of study. Here, much would depend on the course of his self-preparation.

It is a paradox in military affairs that the surest way to obtain a hearing for unorthodox views is to prove oneself a master of orthodox actions. When preparation for the battlefield was neglected for the immaculate conception of the parade ground, a tactical enthusiast could gain recognition, and condonation for his eccentricities, by showing his superiority to others as a drill-master.

Thus we should not be surprised to discover the narrow path whereby Foch obtained his chance to deal with the wider problems of war. In 1891, his second year on the General Staff, there were autumn manœuvres. "Oh! those autumn manœuvres. Naturally they were to end with a review. I was appointed to organise it. . . . I astonished them. No one had ever succeeded before in massing more than 100,000 men on a rectangle 120 metres broad and 100 metres long—a mere pocket-handkerchief! I made them march past by Army Corps. At eight o'clock there wasn't even a cat on the parade ground. At ten minutes past there were 100,000 men. They came up from all sides, in columns, not in extended line. And a quarter of an hour after the review, the parade ground was absolutely empty.

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Every detachment had its own route to the entraining station. . . . Like a flight of sparrows ! ”

Promoted to Chef d'Escadron (Major) that same year he left the War Ministry for a turn of regimental duty, in command of a horse artillery group at Vincennes. This in itself was an augury, because of the priority traditionally accorded to the mobile branch of the artillery arm. In 1894 he again returned to the Operations branch of the General Staff, and then on October 31st, 1895, he was appointed Assistant Professor of Military History, Strategy, and Applied Tactics, at the Ecole Supérieure de Guerre. It was his decisive opportunity, and to prove still more decisive in fulfilment. Curiously it came to him on a day in the year which nineteen years later marked a crisis in the fortunes of Foch and of the embattled forces in France.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FOUNDATIONS OF A FAITH

How far was Foch equipped for the task of teaching his subject ? The answer is to be found in his own words : “ What forced me to work at my profession was having to teach it. . . . I asked myself : ‘ What are the elements of war ? ’ I read Clausewitz. . . . There was a man for you ! There was something solid in that book.” There certainly was. The ponderous tomes of Clausewitz are so solid as to cause mental indigestion to any student who swallows them without a long course of preparation. Only a mind developed by years of study and reflection can dissolve the solid lump into digestible particles. Critical power and a wide knowledge of history are also necessary for producing the juices to counteract the Clausewitzian fermentation.

In these corrective qualifications Foch was handicapped. For years, like most soldiers, his mind had been submerged in technical and tactical study, revolving on no higher plane than that of mimic battle exercises on the map and on the ground,

conducted in accord with the prevailing formulas of official theory. If Foch was fond of reading history in his leisure hours, his historical reading would appear to have been limited in scope and dubious in substance. What he read, he read carefully and repeatedly, turning it over in his mind. But the value of such meditation depends on the matter absorbed and on the breadth of the reader's background.

There is no sign in Foch's lectures that he followed Napoleon's advice to "read and re-read the campaigns of the Great Captains" from Alexander to Frederick. Foch went no further back than the Napoleonic Wars and was satisfied to supplement these simply by a study of the 1866 and 1870 campaigns, so that his deductions inevitably had a narrow basis. If this deprived his deductions of universal truth, their specific truth was impaired by the faultiness of his sources. For Napoleon's campaigns the idolatrous trend of military literature then in vogue caused Foch to rely on books that portrayed Napoleon as the immaculate genius of war; for 1870, the records were still incomplete. And Foch had neither the time nor the bent for critical research.

It is true that some of his printed lectures are so packed with quotations as to give a casual reader the impression of wide learning, but under analysis many of these quotations are seen to be merely proverbial tags. For the historical, if not the philosophical, origins of Foch's ideas there is greater significance in what he omits to quote.

His theory of war was not original; yet too recent. He took the philosophical frame of his theory direct from Clausewitz, who, as the teacher of the Prussian Army, had become the recognised master in the eyes of military Europe. The result of the 1866 and 1870 wars was accepted as proof that his theories were correct and his interpretation of Napoleon exact.

Clausewitz had proclaimed the sovereign virtues of the will to conquer, the unique value of the offensive carried out with unlimited violence by a nation in arms and the power of military action to override everything else. He had argued that to overthrow the main enemy in battle should be the primary aim. This was a theory of the ideal, rarely fulfilled in the history of war. Napoleon, its alleged exponent, attacked weakness rather than strength in his earlier and most profitable campaigns, cutting off the enemy's limbs before he attempted to overthrow the main



body. And if, later, he tended to change his direction, it is well to remember that St. Helena became his destination.

In proclaiming his theory Clausewitz at least hedged it with reservations. Unfortunately it was the general tenor of his teaching that caught the attention of his followers, to the disregard of his qualifying comments. Thus what in his teaching was an undue emphasis became through them a distortion.

Foch acted as an amplifier for Clausewitz's more extreme notes. In his mouth the destruction of the enemy's main army became the only means to the goal, and battle "the only argument in war." This ultra-narrow view led him to disregard other forms of pressure, naval and economic. It led him also into pitfalls of inconsistency. After declaring that "no strategy can prevail over that which seeks to obtain tactical results," he illustrated his general theory by a partial study of the campaign of 1796, a campaign in which Bonaparte actually attained his object without any general, still less any conclusive, engagement—by strategy so superior that it nullified the need for battle.

That Foch had caught only Clausewitz's strident generalisations, and not his subtler undertones, is apparent in the contradictions which mark the opening chapters of his first book, *Des Principes de la Guerre*. Although vivid wording and striking metaphors give an impression of radiance, the rays of thought are obscured by the dust of words. A sidelight on his own uncertainty is the way, when attempting to define the principles of war, he ends his brief list with an "etc."

A year after his appointment to the Ecole de Guerre the professorship of the course became vacant owing to the departure of Colonel Bonnal, who had left a deep impression on the theory taught there. Bonnal had sought by study to extract the secret of Napoleon's method, and tended to ascribe it primarily to the use of a strategic advanced guard—employed to feel for and seize hold of the enemy, paralysing his freedom of action. When Foch was told that he would be Bonnal's successor, he is said to have offered a momentary objection on the score that he was not yet sufficiently sure of his principles. If the diffidence did him credit, it was based on a justified doubt.

For it becomes clear that the incompleteness of his own study

was a real handicap. And, in consequence, when he took the professorial chair of "Military History, Strategy, and Applied Tactics," he tended to make the first two subjects subordinate to the third—which lay within the field of his professional experience. In other words, he was content to teach what he knew, grafting it on a general theory of war that he accepted from authority without critical examination. It is true that he told his pupils that they must learn to reason, that they must have "freedom of mind, no prepossessions"; but he immediately qualified this by saying that they would be taught a theory which, in his words, "would not be open to discussion."

To this attitude of mind he was predisposed by his military training, if perhaps also by his religious faith. And he was the less likely to question the Clausewitzian foundations of his military faith because they accorded so completely with his own character, with his unquestionable strength of will and passionate conviction of the power of faith to overcome obstacles.

Thus Foch's chief contribution to the French theory of war was to strengthen its Clausewitzian character. While many of the French military thinkers of the time had been tending to find Napoleon's secret recipe for victory in some geometrical formula of manœuvre, Foch, the former "geometrical mind," dwelt instead upon a psychological secret—"the will to conquer." He quoted a saying of Joseph de Maistre: "A lost battle is a battle which one believes lost; in a material sense no battle can be lost." From this he argued: "If defeat comes from moral causes, victory may come from moral causes also, and one may say, 'A battle won is a battle we will not acknowledge to be lost.'" Here he unveiled one aspect of the most fundamental truth in war. But his logic was illogical in order, and so incomplete. For the logical corollary to the argument that victory comes from moral causes is surely—"A battle won is a battle that we can persuade the enemy he has lost." This is the active form of the moral causes—which determine victory. Secondary to it, if its essential complement, is the passive form—the refusal to acknowledge defeat.

In the war to come, as in his teaching, Foch's main achievement was to infuse activity into the passive form. It would help him to triumphs of defence that had been conceived by him as offence. But success might have come earlier, and have been

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purchased at less cost, if he had preserved the logical order and given his first thought to the problem of developing the active form.

When Foch spoke of "we" he was, rightly, thinking primarily not of the troops but of the commander. "An army is to a commander what a sword is to a soldier: it is only worth anything in so far as it receives from him a certain impulse." "Great results in war are due to the commander." Foch was fond of quoting Napoleon's aphorism: "Cæsar, and not the Roman legions, conquered Gaul, and Rome trembled before Hannibal, not because of the Carthaginian soldiery." But Foch's emphasis on the importance of the commander was one-sided. He was more concerned to fortify his own will as a commander than to weaken the will of the opposing commander.

Hence he gave too little attention to the active use of surprise, the most vital element in war, and the primary means by which one can persuade—or delude—the opponent that he has lost. Foch's teaching did not entirely ignore the use of surprise, but he narrowed it down to a mere accentuation of the physical act of concentrating superior force at one point. He dismissed the psychological subtleties practised by the pre-Napoleonic Great Captains as part of the "old fencing" and of the despised "small war" which had been superseded when the nation in arms came into vogue.

Yet, curiously, his predominant faith in moral power led him to underestimate material factors such as armament. His writings give inadequate emphasis to the effect of weapons, and their probable development, upon strategy and tactics. He was apparently too engrossed with the morale of the leader to meditate upon the way the possession of superior or inferior weapons might affect the morale of the led. And thus he tended to overlook the reaction of this effect upon the leader's power, with the result that when war came he himself was taken by surprise.

Is there a specific explanation of his disproportionate concern to strengthen the mind of the leader? Can we perhaps trace it to the disasters of 1870 and the impression they made on Foch's mind? He was determined to correct the sense of inferiority which those disasters had produced in the French Army. But in Foch's own concern, which led to a one-sided form of teach-

ing, a psycho-analyst would probably detect a deep-seated "inferiority complex."

The suggestion is strengthened by a further contradiction. Foch's teaching was admirably calculated to fortify the powers of resistance and endurance—essentially defensive qualities. Yet, paradoxically, he made himself the advocate of the offensive. All his teaching converged on the idea of "organising a shock both supreme and final." Here, as in his historical illustrations, one can trace the influence of Captain Gilbert, an influence none the less significantly perceptible because unacknowledged as a source. Any French military lecturer in the 'nineties needed dexterity to achieve such omission.

For Gilbert had stamped on the military mind of France his deduction that Bazaine and the defensive were chiefly responsible for the defeat of 1870. A classmate of Joffre's at the Polytechnique, although a star twinkling high above him, Gilbert had come to be regarded as the destined chief of his generation when disease cut short his army career. It could not quench his spirit nor his power. He would still be the man of destiny, even though he exchanged the sword for the pen. The initials "G.G." soon became famous in military literature. Grouard, who also left the army to devote himself to writing and became the most penetrating interpreter of Napoleonic strategy, has recorded of Gilbert: "Almost all his judgments became those of the Ecole de Guerre and of the Historical Section of the General Staff, which was only an emanation of him."

One may add that Grouard, a stern realist, served the cause of truth so straitly in his historical writings that he became increasingly unpopular with those who were responsible for the military education of officers. Gilbert, in contrast, flattered the vanity of military France by his clarion call for a revival of the *furia francese* and by the consoling simplicity that marked his explanation of 1870. He became the prophet of the offensive. Foch would be the vocal chord that linked Gilbert with the school of Grandmaison, the final prophet of the *offensive à outrance* and the precipitator of disaster in 1914.

Foch's middle position, however, symbolised his relatively less extreme committal to this all too simple theory. If he was over-ready to believe that the offensive was an infallible remedy in all circumstances, he prescribed certain precautions in the way

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it was injected. As Bonnal's successor, it was natural that he should adopt Bonnal's theory of the advanced guard. But he also adapted it, giving a more elastic sense to an idea that tended to become geometrical. He instilled the necessity of "fixing" the enemy as a safeguard to the offensive and a preliminary to manœuvre. The advanced guard would form the eyes and the arms of the main body. One must grip the enemy by the throat before attempting the knock-out blow—which might otherwise hit the air. Depicting this action in terms of personal combat, in his lectures Foch used forceful gestures to enhance his striking metaphors. And by the physical demonstration he unconsciously emphasised the essentially tactical trend of his teaching.

This problem of *sûreté*—of sure information and secure movement in delivering the offensive—fills the greater part of his two books. He treats it through historical examples examined at great length. Far the largest section of the *Principes de la Guerre* is devoted—contrary to his title—to a microscopic tactical study of the action of a small Prussian advanced guard at Nachod in 1866. For his material, Foch appears to have owed an unacknowledged debt to Kuhne's critical study of this episode.

Foch's second book, *La Conduite de la Guerre*, has more sequence of argument and of subject. It avoids the pitfalls of the first because its scope is confined to one serial example—the first phase of the 1870 campaign. The field had been minutely if still incompletely surveyed by numerous French and German military historians, and Foch profited by the result to produce a study which admirably suited him—that of a directing general at work, hour by hour and day by day. While sympathetically appraising many of Moltke's good points, Foch found the explanation of all his misadventures in a neglect to fulfil the principle of *sûreté*. Moltke would have fared better if, instead of trying to gauge by reason what the French would do, he had used a general advanced guard to find and fix them. He was too apt, in Foch's view, to act upon preconceived ideas. But German errors were often redeemed, as those of the French were not, by the initiative of subordinate commanders, whose intelligent team-work led them to take steps that fulfilled the spirit of their orders when the latter did not fit the circumstances. To

examples of such "intellectual discipline" Foch gave the greatest emphasis and his highest praise.

The reader of Foch's books feels that the author turns with relief from the philosophy of war to these concrete cases, a descent from the clouds to seemingly solid ground. His stance might have been truer, however, if it had been wider. In his study of *sûreté* his mind was concentrated too exclusively on the problem of ensuring that the attack reached its target. He was too little concerned with what would happen then, or too ready to assume that the target, like the familiar hinged plate on peacetime rifle-ranges, would fall with a clatter. He pictured an enemy who would be trying to evade the blow rather than an enemy who might be waiting, solidly and ready, to repel the blow. He was so intent to ensure that the blow should travel on a direct line to the target, without interruption on its course, that he did not pause to meditate the need of weakening the target's resistance.

The psychology of the indirect approach was by him unexplored. So far as he considered the indirect approach, it was merely as a geographical line to the enemy's flank.

Here we can trace the effect of his limited historical study. His teaching gave little heed to the possibilities of the defensive-offensive, to the idea, most fruitful in history, of inducing the enemy to exhaust himself in a fruitless assault and then launching a counter-stroke. It was significant that while proclaiming Napoleon as the supreme master, Foch omitted any analysis of his supreme battlepiece—Austerlitz. It was significant, too, that he completely ignored Wellington and the methods that had brought him success.

Adopting the offensive as the essential form of action, Foch's sequence of action was, first, to feel for one's enemy, then to grip him; finally to "strike one supreme stroke on one point," using one's reserve "as a club" which, by its weight and momentum, would shatter one part of the enemy's array, one link in his chain of organisation, so leading to a general collapse. This theory, essentially mechanistic or mathematical, was too simple for truth. It comes curiously from the lips of one who had proclaimed the supremacy of moral factors. But its fallacy was exposed, above all, by a material factor—the modern development of weapons. Calculated to achieve success by a skilled

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mechanical process of concentrating superior numbers at one point, the formula would be nullified by the mechanical progress which made one man sitting behind a machine-gun the superior of a hundred or more who were advancing upon him with a bayonet. The more ranks of attackers, the more swaths of dead. It was no use to concentrate a reserve five or ten ranks deep at a point held by only one line of defenders, if your first line could not break through that one line. In the face of this difficulty the mechanistic theory broke down in 1914-18. To break the line one had to revive, if also to adapt, the old ruses and tricks of surprise practised throughout the ages.

Foch's misconception was in part due to a misplaced belief that "any improvement in fire-arms is bound to add strength to the offensive." He arrived at this astonishing conclusion by the purely mathematical argument that if one launched 2,000 men against 1,000 when both sides were armed with a weapon firing one shot a minute, there was a margin of 1,000 shots in favour of the attacker, whereas if armed with a weapon firing ten shots a minute the margin would be increased to 10,000. This ignored such practical matters as the modern defenders' ability to fire from behind cover and with more careful aim while their assailants are exposed.

In a too apt simile Foch compared his method of examining historical cases to the scientist's use of a microscope. The fundamental fault of his study was that it was too microscopic. It was concentrated on such examples from the campaigns of Napoleon and Moltke as suited his theory, and ignored the rest of history. If he had examined the American Civil War he would have seen clear evidence of the growing power of defence over attack, and renewed evidence that fighting was not the only means to victory.

In another simile he compared his doctrine to a "bonfire lighted on a dangerous coast to assist doubtful navigators." But because of his tendency to discount the influence of armament and the necessity of surprise, it proved a wrecker's lantern which led the navigators of military France among shoals where they ran aground and almost foundered. For the generation of his pupils, running to extremes as is the way of disciples, exalted the will to conquer into a catch-phrase specific for victory. Obsessed with the virtues of the offensive, they came to believe

that they had only to attack with sufficient fervour to be certain of conquering. Thus it was left for August, 1914, to show that bullets—the hardest of facts—can overcome the will of the commander by shattering the bodies of his men.\*

## CHAPTER IV

## THE PLAYTHINGS OF FATE

WHILE Foch, in his chair at the Ecole de Guerre, was wrapped in contemplation of war, a storm had been gathering overhead. Soon it was to break with a peal of thunder that shattered, not merely his reveries, but his position—and, almost, his future career.

This storm was the reversed sequel of one that had earlier wrecked the career of a man who had been with him on the General Staff—Alfred Dreyfus. As the one was the victim of anti-clericalism, so the other had been the victim of anti-Semitism. This movement, a late growth in France, had gathered vengeful strength from the Jewish share in the defeat of Boulanger's dream of a military *coup d'état*, and from Jewish implication in the Panama scandal.

Then one day in October, 1894, the anti-Semitic organ *La Libre Parole*, made the sensational first announcement that a Jewish officer of the General Staff, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, had been arrested on a charge of selling French military secrets to a foreign power—Germany. To allay the thirst of its readers for further news and fresh Jew-baiting, the paper developed an attack on the Minister of War for his assumed desire, as a republican, to shield such a military traitor. Joy was released and hatred unleashed by the official announcement that a court-martial, sitting in secret, had convicted Dreyfus and sentenced him to lifelong imprisonment. In January he was publicly

\* A fuller analysis, for students, of Foch's teachings on war is given in Appendix I.



paraded and degraded, stripped of his buttons and badges before being taken away to the transport which would bear him to the aptly and awesomely named Devil's Island, off the coast of French Guiana. While the mob howled in execration, some more concrete-minded patriots sought to point the lesson by applying dynamite to the summary excavation of the Rothschild bank. Frenzy carried to an extreme even united the two extremes—Royalists and Socialists. For the latter, subsequently the defenders of Dreyfus, at first found grievance in the wealth of the Dreyfus family—a slight lapse of logic on their part in view of the motive for his alleged crime. They complained that this richly connected officer merely suffered transportation, whereas a common soldier would have been shot. Outside his family Dreyfus at first found few friends. In a land where the law presumes guilt until innocence is proved, no public feeling was aroused by secrecy of trial and ignorance of evidence.

Unhappily for their object, the fanatical anti-Dreyfusards sought to stamp out the embers of doubt by providing the public with evidence. A facsimile of the *Bordereau*—a list of documents which Dreyfus was said to have prepared for the German military attaché—was published in the Press. This too clever move gave his friends the possibility of challenge, and gave others the possibility of doubt whether this list was in his handwriting. From this clue sprang volcanic consequences.

Meanwhile, a new chief had been appointed to the Intelligence Branch of the General Staff. This Colonel Picquart suffered from a Gentile conscience that was troublesome and a desire for truth that was inconvenient—to his superiors. He studied the dossier of the trial and doubted its justice. Disbelief in the guilt of Dreyfus was followed by suspicion of a Commandant Esterhazy, as the real author of the *Bordereau* and purveyor of secrets. But on raising the question with his own chief, Picquart met with a cold reception. Better that the guilty should escape than that the innocent should be saved at the expense of the Army's reputation for justice. To reopen the case would reveal the fallibility of the military hierarchy, and give an opening to hostile political elements. Picquart persisted. So the authorities sought a solution by sending him on a dangerous African expedition. Death might silence doubt.

As a further precaution, hints were dropped of the discovery

of a Jewish conspiracy to undermine the solidity of the Army. But Picquart, before leaving, had also taken a precaution. He had told his lawyer of his discovery. The Dreyfus party was fortified, and its numbers grew. Then fresh "revelations" by authority, intended as sedatives, became emetics. For they showed that the conviction of Dreyfus had been based partly on documents that were not shown to his counsel. It meant that the Ministry of War had virtually suborned the judges, without giving the accused a chance of disproof and defence, in violation of the elements of justice. Worse still, some of these privily shown documents were forgeries.

Late in 1897 Dreyfus's brother, armed with accumulated evidence, denounced Esterhazy to the Minister of War. His action was reinforced politically by a Protestant Senator, whose espousal of the cause made the clerical party and Press more bitterly anti-Dreyfus and anti-Semitic.

The Government conceded the court-martial of Esterhazy but declared that the Dreyfus case "no longer existed." And the Army took care that Esterhazy was acquitted. It was then that Zola stepped into the arena with a scathing open letter of denunciation—*J'accuse*—which, because of its deadly charges and his literary fame, startled the world. In retaliation he was prosecuted for libel, was driven to flee from France. He at least escaped more lightly than Picquart, who, having safely returned to France, there to renew his efforts on behalf of Dreyfus, was, for the safety of the General Staff, imprisoned without trial. Most astonishing of all, the majority of the public gave their sympathy and support to the military authorities, who had made shrewd appeal to patriotism, raising the cry of "The country is in danger," and posing as the one sound organ in a corrupt country. For a time they succeeded. Many of the people had lost faith in Parliament, in financiers, and in the Church. Only the Army was left as an object for faith, and to this they clung desperately. Generals and court-martial judges were popular heroes. But the revulsion was the worse when it came, and the Army paid the penalty—for putting authority above truth.

The first crack came in August, 1898. The new civilian Minister of War had just produced fresh proofs of Dreyfus's guilt, so convincing that Parliament ordered them to be placarded

throughout France. But the Minister himself was less convinced by these papers provided by his advisers. A re-examination revealed that they were forgeries. Colonel Henry, Picquart's successor as Chief of the Intelligence, then confessed that he had forged them, and after being placed under arrest was found with his throat cut.

The outcry of the Dreyfusards, already supported by the powerful pen of Clemenceau, was now more widely taken up by Socialists anxious to discredit the Army and the Church. This hardened the resistance and the hearts of the military chiefs. Dreyfus became a pawn in the struggle for and against the Army. The political life of France was convulsed by the clamour of faction. Rumours of military plots against the Republic became rife and were fostered by actual attempts to induce the military to evict the President. Ministries rose and fell with more than normal rapidity. Meantime the case of Dreyfus had been sent for review to the Court of Cassation, the supreme civil court, which quashed the proceedings and ordered a retrial.

The new court-martial assembled at Rennes, whither Dreyfus was brought back from Devil's Island. The military judges showed a consistency of conviction but not a consistency of reason. For, by a majority, they reaffirmed his guilt but found "extenuating circumstances," and reduced his punishment to ten years' detention. If they hoped, by this compromise of truth and logic, to preserve the rightness of authority they signally failed. The inconsequence was too palpable. The Government intervened by advising the President of the Republic to pardon Dreyfus. If this was a further breach of logic, it at least warded off further breach of the peace, as well as satisfying a majority of the public who had grown sick of tumult. Another six years was to pass before, in a calm atmosphere, the innocence of Dreyfus was judicially established, and in slight atonement he and Picquart were restored to the Army with a step in rank.

More immediate was the political reaction of the crisis. By ranging the Army and the Church against the Republic it gave the Socialist party a hold on and in the Government. This position in turn produced a drastic campaign to curb the Church and cleanse the Army, a campaign that was watched apathetically by a populace whose sympathy they had forfeited. The people, indeed, were the more ready to support Parliament in strong

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action because their loss of faith in it had been due essentially to its habit of inaction.

Unhappily, this action merely swung to the other extreme—from persecution of the Jews to persecution of the Catholics. General André, becoming Minister of War, applied an anti-clerical purge. The Ecole de Guerre, as the educational pulpit of the Army, came early under his scrutiny.

Foch, as a certain Catholic and an uncertain republican, was one of those who fell under the ban. The definite fact that his brother was a Jesuit weighted the scales against him, and mere indefiniteness of political views could not redress the balance.

Nor did his punishment end with the banishment to Laon—as Lieutenant-Colonel of the 29th Regiment of Artillery—in October, 1901. For although he had been recommended for promotion, General André withheld it. Foch had to wait another three years for his colonelcy, performing the limited functions of a second-in-command in a small garrison town.

“My career seemed ruined, badly compromised at the least, and if I had nourished the least illusion in this respect comrades took care to undeceive me : ‘Oh !’ they chaffed me, ‘you can ignore the present régime, you can take your Easter sacraments and follow your processions as much as you like—but in that case you will never be promoted Colonel.’ ‘And you,’ I replied, ‘do you expect to avoid trouble by cringing and by crying, “Down with the priests !” ? All right ! Go on doing so, if your heart tells you. But as for me, whatever happens I’m not going to change my ways.’” Nor did he.

When comrades who had suffered similarly spoke of resigning their commissions, he argued that such an act would be desertion. “You have no pluck ! When war comes you will have to put up with worse things than that ! If you can’t stand it now, what will you do then ?”

If he was depressed he did not waver. Still less did he seek to ingratiate himself with the powers in Paris. To a comrade of Polytechnique days who had become a militarist publicist, he wrote at this time : “I rarely go to Paris ; asking nothing of anyone, and waiting calmly until I am sent to another post.” Such a phrase is so often coined by those who beg that it is, at first sound, suspect. But this friend, Colonel Mayer, was con-

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vinced that the coin rang true. And his critical distrust of Foch's teaching lends weight to his favourite judgment of Foch's character. There is significance in his verdict that if Foch "did not work for himself, if he was not ambitious for his own advancement, he strove for the triumph of his ideas." This comment provides a clue to the future, in tracing the devious paths of Foch's war career.

His exile at Laon did not quench his faith in his mission, and he utilised his leisure to work up some of his Ecole de Guerre lectures into a book which would both preserve and spread his gospel. Soon after the *Principes de la Guerre* was published, in 1903, he referred to it in a letter, with deeper truth than he realised, as "a work of faith rather than of science."

How strange that Laon should have been the scene of its preparation! How ominous as a place of inspiration! For there in 1814, Napoleon, advancing from the Chemin-des-Dames, suffered a defeat at the hands of the Prussians from which he failed to recover before the entry of the invaders into Paris sealed his fate. That Foch should have come to Laon as his place of military exile seems fresh fulfilment of that destiny which, as if in relativity, brought these two along parallel courses. And from this locality, fifteen years later, the Germans were to strike at the Chemin-des-Dames, delivering the severest blow that Foch suffered when in supreme command of the Allied Armies. From that stroke he but narrowly recovered, and by that stroke Paris was endangered. Well might it seem that an inimical spirit brooded over Laon.

Scarcely less sinister in atmosphere was his next destination, Vannes, whither he was sent to command the 35th Regiment of Artillery in 1903 on his belated promotion to Colonel. Vannes in Morbihan, close to the Biscayan coast, was pervaded with grim, eerie memories of the Chouan revolt against the Red Terror. Its superstitious, fanatically Catholic people still wore the secretly defiant air stamped on their forbears by persecution and repression. The very buildings bore uneffaced traces of that struggle, wherein flagrant brutality was combated by mysterious atrocity. And when Foch arrived the sullenness of a resentful people had just been deepened by the arbitrary closing of the Jesuit College.

Had he been sent there to test his loyalty to the Republic?



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Was his colonel's command in such an uneasy spot proffered as the rope with which he was invited to hang himself? He himself had, and retained, such suspicions. It was significant, too, that he was placed under a staunchly Protestant superior, General Millet. But those who may have so cleverly contrived this trap made a slip. They perhaps forgot that years earlier Foch had been a pupil of Millet at the Ecole de Guerre.

"If they believed that ruffled feelings, that clashes between us would be caused by our divergent beliefs, if they had perhaps counted on such, they were thoroughly deceived. Millet was fully aware of my religious opinions, he knew that I had a Jesuit brother. But he also knew other things about me. . . . In short, if I am now a Marshal of France, it is to this Protestant without fanaticism that I owe it; my path blocked, it was he who opened it. . . . And he is the source of my military success, completed by Joffre and Clemenceau."

At Vannes, fortified by such sympathy and confidence, Foch strove to develop the gunnery standard of his new regiment. His practical bent and objective habit of thought made him impatient of routine duties and, still more, of the outward smartness upon which peace-time soldiering tends so much to be concentrated. As a regimental commander, he applied to his task his inherent and inevitable question: "*De quoi s'agit-il?*" And the answer, to his mind, was clearly: "To teach his men to fire their guns." Before this essential all other considerations had to give way, and he was apt to be impatient of all range-orders and administrative calls which seemed to obstruct rather than assist his end. He had this period in mind when, at the end of his life, he wrote: "To command troops is certainly the greatest pleasure of military life, but above all is this so when one is a captain or a colonel. For the captain, by reason of his immediate contact with the rank and file . . .; for the colonel, because of the influence he exerts on a body of officers. . . . It is through his officers that a colonel moulds his regiment so that it becomes the very image of its commander."

One personal convenience of being stationed at Vannes was the opportunity it gave him to slip over to Treufeunteuniou on leave, there to refresh his mind by tending his garden. His spells of leave, too, were used in preparing a second volume of his Ecole de Guerre lectures for publication. More consecutive and

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more concrete than his first book, because it was a day by day analysis of the German leadership in 1870, it appeared in 1905 under the title *De la Conduite de la Guerre*.

That year brought him a change of scene. General Millet had been appointed to the command of the V Army Corps at Orleans, and he paid tribute to Foch's work at Vannes by obtaining his transfer to be his chief of staff. At Orleans, Foch was happy in his enlarged scope and in his continued service under Millet.

Moreover, he had once again come to a site full of historical and symbolical associations—this time of happier history and symbolism. At Orleans had begun the *Revanche* which immortalised the name of Joan of Arc. More recently, it had been in 1870 the focus of that uprising of the French people in arms which so nearly retrieved the collapse of the French professional army. If the campaign of the *Défense Nationale* had ultimately failed, largely because the wine of new service was poured into the bottle of old generalship, it had severely jarred the German war machine, and had done much to rebuild French prestige from the wreckage of Sedan. Thus Orleans was a site of inspiration and suggestion.

Millet lost no opportunity of pointing the lesson—that the Germans had limitations. And, as Foch confessed later, it was Millet who taught him “that we ought not to fear them.” “They know their trade, they are professional soldiers, but we can do as well as they.”

Millet, too, was fond of preaching the cult of adaptability, and argued that to train for war over the probable scene of war was likely to develop preconceived ideas—and a preconceived plan. “General Millet was always telling me—‘What is wrong with Conseil Supérieur is that all the generals composing it have held the Nancy command. They know every inch of the ground there. They have studied every position—the Grand Couronné, the Haricot de X—, Z Ridge. The battle of Nancy! That is the only one for which they have prepared.’”

Millet's wisdom was to be proved, too well, in August, 1914. His remark gives us a clue, generally ignored, to the preconceived basis of the now notorious Plan XVII, and to the cause of the blind eye that the French command turned to the manifold signs of the German enveloping sweep through Belgium. They



had trained for the decisive battle in Lorraine; hence the decisive battle must come in Lorraine.

That Foch himself profited by Millet's insistence on elasticity is clear in the light of history. That he might have profited more is no less clear. He became more adaptable as the war progressed, as hard blows dissolved hardening conceptions. If in the earlier stages he seemed to forget his *Ecole de Guerre* cry of "no preconceptions," is it partially to be traced to the fact that on the eve of the war Foch himself held the Nancy command?

Promotion to the rank of general of brigade came at last in June, 1907. At the age of fifty-six Foch reached the rank which Napoleon attained at twenty-four—what a world of difference in this comparison, the difference, peradventure, between Napoleonic war and "modern" war!

Upon his promotion he was given command of the artillery of the V Corps. But his tenure was brief. General Bonnal was about to vacate the post of Commandant of the *Ecole de Guerre*, which he had received shortly before Foch's dismissal from his professorial chair. Earlier still Bonnal had been Foch's predecessor in that chair. Perhaps the coincidence seemed to Foch propitious, suggesting to his mind a second coincidence of succession.

Foch certainly cherished the desire for such a post and its influence on military thought, and in Millet he found both a sympathiser and a promoter of his purpose. Millet happened to be an intimate friend of Picquart, who had just been made not only a general but Minister of War. This dramatic atonement for the past, for the sacrifice of his career in the cause of truth, was due to Clemenceau, who, in October, 1906, had become Prime Minister.

Millet, who was as anxious as Foch to put the teaching of war on a higher plane, sought to impress on Picquart that Foch was the ideal choice as Bonnal's successor. He came back full of hope that the idea would mature. But clouds gathered on the horizon. After the usual review of troops on the National Fête Day, July 14th, Millet broke the news to Foch. "Yesterday, I had lunch at the Rue Saint Dominique. I wanted to know from Picquart how your nomination as Commandant of the *Ecole de Guerre* was going on. Picquart replied: 'I'm extremely sorry; nothing can be done. Clemenceau does not want Foch.' 'And

for what reason?' 'For all the reasons that you know as well as I do.' But after recounting this damping conversation Millet struck a brighter note. "We are not beaten. Nothing is lost, as long as we act promptly. You will catch the train for Paris and present yourself to-morrow morning to Clemenceau, as sent by me. You will put your case to him. He'll give you a rating. You'll attract him in spite of himself. Splendid! He's a man who loathes people who flinch. You're the same. You're both made for each other."

So next morning Foch made his way to the "Tiger's" den through the unnaturally quiet streets of a city still sleeping off the fatigue of its revels. To him it seemed an ominous hush. A young doorkeeper growled, "The Prime Minister is not receiving. . . . In any case there's a Cabinet meeting due now."

"Give him my card all the same." The man grumblingly did as he was bid, and came back with a wonder-struck air: "The Prime Minister will see you." But a sarcastic curl of the lip seemed to say: "You want to see the Tiger; you damned well will."

As Foch passed in, Clemenceau did not rise to receive him. Instead, he sat bristling, couched to spring like his namesake, and shot out the sharp questions: "What have you come here for? Who's told you to see me?"

"General Millet, Prime Minister."

"I haven't told him to do so," Clemenceau retorted.

"That's correct. But he has told me of your attitude towards me, of the objections you've raised against my nomination to the command of the Ecole de Guerre. And it's he who has insisted that I should come and give an account of myself to you."

"All right! Let's have it."

"Have you any complaint against me as a soldier, Prime Minister?"

"No, you're a good officer and you've got the confidence of your superiors. That's not the point."

"What is the point, then? My religious opinions? I don't deny them. That my brother is a Jesuit? That's a fact."

"That your brother is a Jesuit doesn't matter, nor your personal beliefs."

"What is the matter, then?"

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According to Foch, Clemenceau skilfully evaded the charge, and drew the conversation into a general discourse on domestic and European affairs. They had been talking for fifty minutes. It was twenty-five minutes past nine, and the Cabinet meeting should have begun at nine. Foch, tenaciously holding on, felt it was time to pull in the rein.

"Now, Prime Minister, as regards myself, what's your decision?"

"Ah! If it was a question of a troop command, I would soon give it to you. But the command of the Ecole de Guerre, that's another matter, that's too critical a matter. And, to begin with, what would you teach there?"

"What I've already taught there and have embodied in my two treatises published by Berger-Levrault."

"I don't know them."

"Allow me to send you them."

Foch said good-bye, went to his publishers, despatched the volumes to Clemenceau, and caught the train back to Orleans.

He heard nothing further for a couple of months. Then, at the army manoeuvres in September, Picquart saw him and told him that he must rub in certain lessons at the Ecole de Guerre. "What! At the Ecole de Guerre! Am I going there?" "So it seems. Clemenceau has read your books. He swears not at you but by you now, and you are his man."

But betwixt cup and lip there was nearly a slip. On September 25th the papers contained an announcement of Foch's nomination to the command of the Ecole de Guerre. But next day the Official Gazette was blank. There had evidently been protests and a last hour postponement. A full week passed without news. Then, on October 3rd, came a telegram from Clemenceau, summoning Foch to Paris.

It was a Sunday. So once more he arrived at an ominously quiet building. If Clemenceau's greeting was more pleasant than the first time his opening words were more shattering of hope.

"There's nothing doing. I wanted to appoint you. It seems to be impossible. There's a dossier against you, a complete dossier—look!" Clemenceau pointed to a bulky file. He opened it, and read: "Reports of the Prefects on General Foch."

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From the Prefect of the Aisne—"A very distinguished officer, but a doubtful republican." Humph! You see. What have you got to say?"

"Nothing. Or rather, I ask for preciseness, for facts. Are there any?"

"Wait, I will look. . . . No, there are only appreciations, not facts."

"And is that what you call a complete dossier?"

According to Foch, this thrust made an impression. But its visible result was for the moment only to make Clemenceau change his ground.

"We'll leave aside the Prefects' reports. There are graver charges. Here, for example—"This officer, during his professorship at the Ecole de Guerre, virtually taught metaphysics—and metaphysics so abstruse that it made idiots of a number of his pupils. Even General Bonnal himself asked for his removal."

"If that charge is true, Prime Minister, I must be a man of the type of Jourdain who made prose without knowing it. It can only be in that way that I have taught metaphysics, for I don't know what they are."

Once more, according to Foch, this reply pleased Clemenceau, and even drew from him the admission that he had found no abstruseness in Foch's books. But, once more also he produced another charge out of the conjurer's dossier.

"This officer, in his annual gradings, has always favoured pupils who have come from clerical colleges to the detriment of the others." As a reinforcement to this charge a slip of paper was attached, being headed by the name of Colonel de Grand-maison.

"Ten names, Prime Minister. And more than seven hundred pupils have passed through my hands."

This last rejoinder seems to have convinced Clemenceau of Foch's integrity, or at least to have shaken his faith in the consistency of the dossier, which, Foch declared, had been compiled by General Toutée, the War Minister's *chef du Cabinet*, in order "to trump up a case" against him. According to rumour, Toutée was himself the chief rival candidate for the post.

Next day Foch's appointment to the Ecole de Guerre appeared in the Official Gazette, dated as from October 8th, 1908. It was the perfect atonement for his treatment in 1900. "After being

thrown out through the window I came back through the front door." His satisfaction was the greater because this personal *revanche* not merely gave him the opportunity to prepare the instruments for the national *Revanche*, but seemed to foreshadow it. His work and his country's military renaissance were now more than ever identified in his mind. The phoenix was rising from the ashes.

How prophetic that Orleans should have been the place where Foch's fortune was reborn, the place whence he came to his mission of moulding the military mind of France for the armed hour of her redemption. And even the time of his coming had its symbolical significance. For the year 1908 had witnessed the publication of Anatole France's critical and anti-clerical *Vie de Jeanne d'Arc*, aimed to demolish a legend. Foch's advent to power and to Paris might be conceived as the riposte; the answer of France to Anatole France. And Foch himself, as a male reincarnation—the Man of Orleans.

## CHAPTER V

### THE MISSION AND THE MOULD

FOCH was back at the Ecole de Guerre, and had mounted to the summit. As a pulpit this was not so direct or so intimate a standpoint for teaching as his former chair. His influence was now exerted chiefly in directing the teachers. As in making a fresh negative from an old print, this second-hand interpretation of his doctrine subtly blurred its outline, while the inevitable retouching by other hands produced a different emphasis. Thus, in this second period at the Ecole de Guerre it was more the spirit than the mind of Foch that was diffused.

One should not ignore, moreover, the effect of eight more years' peace soldiering on his own mind, the mind of a man now well on in the fifties. The lectures embodied in his first book had revealed him as struggling to crystallise his own thought, to

develop a definite structure. The second book had attained a more definite form, but in detail rather than in fundamental. It suggested that he had postponed his search for a philosophy of war, his attempt to establish the foundations of his philosophy, in order first to gather further materials for brick-making. A wise preliminary, suggesting that his mind was awakening to the scale of his constructive task.

But then came the break in his career, and consignment to labours of routine. And there is no sign, no further publication, to hint that he tried to complete his philosophical research. It is not easy for a man turned fifty, still less for a man untrained to research, to carry through such a labour—that may involve an unforeseen scale of destruction as preliminary to an unforeseeable volume of construction. Least easy of all is it in a profession of action, where active duty interferes with reflection, where intellect is valued only as expressed in action, where philosophical doubt is instinctively viewed as a possible detriment to action.

Did Foch abandon his search—or perhaps never really pursue it? Was he content with the exploration he had made, and content to assume that another war would be so parallel in conditions to 1870 that he had gone far enough when he found where the leadership in the war had gone wrong? The inference is strengthened not only by the nature of his second book, but by the fact that his second was his last.

Further confirmation comes from the preface which he wrote in 1909 for the second edition of the *Conduite de la Guerre*. It was written to reconcile his deductions with the most recent experience of war, the Russo-Japanese War.

In this preface he first points out the difference between such a war and one in Europe. Whilst he is logical in arguing that, in comparison, the bad roads and few railways in Manchuria hindered strategic deployments and movements, it does not seem to follow that, as he argues, these conditions prevented “thunderbolt strokes.” Rather does his comment seem to underrate the willingness of the Japanese soldier to cast away his life in the assault. Foch then asserts that in the Russo-Japanese War “the existence of the two opposing nations was not at stake, but only their future.” “In consequence”—rather comprehensive consequence, one would suggest—“its lessons are neither

complete nor of immediate interest for us; it is not a pattern for us to copy."

Unfortunately for Foch and a myriad others, its indecisive pattern was to be repeated all too faithfully. What Foch assumed to be the result of special limitations imposed on leadership, was really caused by the limitations of leadership to realise the changed conditions of warfare in general. Persuaded that the conditions had not changed, he continued his preface by showing that, within their specially limited conditions, the Japanese leaders had fulfilled his principles. "The idea of *sûreté* guided and covered all their acts." "One sees the theory of the Napoleonic advanced guard well applied." "When the Japanese pass to action, the spirit of the offensive inspires all their decisions. . . . In strategy, as in tactics, they attack." But this attack is aimed at the enemy's communications or to envelop a flank, and thus repeats the manœuvre-battle of history except that it is longer drawn out, whilst strategy and tactics are more nearly merged. If the attacker had to extend his lines more widely, for such envelopment, he has the telegraph to keep control and the power of entrenchment to allow this extension without risk. Foch regarded the trench as an aid to manœuvre, and does not seem to have considered it as born of necessity, the offspring of modern fire.

Thus, he concluded, there was nothing in the experience of Manchuria to "affect the fundamental principles of the conduct of war that one has sought to bring out in this book." It contained scarcely a mention of the material side of war. Not a word of machine-guns nor of barbed wire, which might so seriously upset his calculations. His material short-sightedness was also exemplified in a comment he made in 1910 when watching the aeronautical Circuit de l'Est: "That's good sport, but for the Army the aeroplane is of no value."

As for Foch's "principles," it is curious that he should have forgotten that he had ended his list with an "etcetera," suggestive of their indefiniteness and of his still incomplete study. There is now no hint that he felt the need of completing it before the time of trial, for himself and for France, arrived. How ironically prophetic that a friend who visited him at this time should have made a casual note that he found him reading Zola's *La Débâcle*.

The apostolic fervour with which Foch propagated his doctrine

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sheds an important light on his character, and, by reflection, on the history of the coming war. For he recognised no other doctrine as worthy of discussion. Unlike other exponents of an authorised doctrine, he did not pay heresy the compliment of persecution. He merely, and blandly, ignored its existence.

This attitude contrasts curiously with his dictum: "We must have freedom of mind, no prejudices, no prepossessions, no fixed ideas, no opinion accepted without discussion and merely because it has always been heard or practised. There should be one test only: reason." Yet there is no sign that Foch ever stooped to reason when confronted with criticisms of his faith in the offensive. Instead, he cries: "No victory without fighting." "It is to the theory of decision by arms that war is now wholly returning; one can now apply no other." "No strategy can henceforth prevail over that which aims at ensuring tactical results, victory by fighting." "Modern war knows but one argument, the tactical fact, battle."

Strangely incongruous words are these in the mouth of the man who later owed so much to the assistance of blockade and propaganda. Strangely do they contrast with his dictum a generation later—after he had waged war—that "air attack, by its crushing moral effect on a nation, may impress public opinion to the point of disarming the Government and thus become decisive." Where is thy "battle" now, O man of one argument? At last the horizon of the mind is widened. But why so late to use that key, given to the students of the *Ecole de Guerre*: "Learn to think"?

The reason would seem to be that the appeal to "reason" in the *Principes de la Guerre* was no more than a prefatory catchword, the sugar to coat a pill that must be swallowed, willy nilly. Foch's real thought—nay, rather, feeling—was expressed in another reference to the principles: "They will not be open to discussion once they have been established." Did neither he nor any of his hearers perceive the contradiction? And how was it possible for the teacher to stay content with establishing a vague list of principles that ended with "etcetera"? Here was surely the supreme triumph of faith and the dethronement of reason!

In the Army, and still more in the *Ecole de Guerre*, Foch's doctrine passed almost without criticism. Soldiers, especially soldiers nourished on the Napoleonic tradition, were unlikely to



question the universal validity of battle. And even the doctrine of the offensive was hardly disputed; its few audible critics had either left the Army or had already reached a grade high enough to raise them out of reach of the doctrinal fanatics. The time was still to come when even the highest durst not question the sovereign efficacy of the offensive for fear of their own dethronement. That time would come when Foch's pupils had consolidated their grip on the General Staff, and in a campaign of ex-communication fulfilled their interpretation of his "intellectual discipline." For in practice the cult of a common mode of thought is apt to mean the suppression of all other modes as heresy, and so the end of free thought.

Inevitably in an army, rank acts as a gag. The gag may be looser or tighter according to the disposition of the superior, but it remains in the mouth of the subordinate as a hindrance to the articulation of his ideas.

Thus Foch was a preacher rather than a teacher. Speaking from a pulpit loftier than ever, he had the preacher's one-sided but two-edged advantage of being immune from challenge. And his was not an ear attuned to catch the undertones of dissent.

Outside the Army, criticism might have been less subdued. But military criticism is the least populous of professions. The critic, moreover, has so much to gain by conforming to the prevailing dogmas—if he but clothes conventional tenets in fresh verbiage his wisdom will be applauded—and so much to lose if he emphasises his inherent isolation by standing against the current. Thus, subtract from the few the fearful, and the residue of true critics may well be zero.

In France at least there were two, the foremost being Grouard. As a young officer Grouard had won the recognition of General Miribel, the rebuildier of the French Army after 1870, and had exercised an influence on the defensive-offensive plan then framed for a war against Germany. But as this plan came into disfavour, so did Grouard. The fact that he had not been through the Ecole de Guerre was raised as a barrier to his advancement, and the fearless candour of his books on the 1870 war raised powerful enemies against him. His military career came to a dead end, and he retired in 1900. Freedom from routine duties allowed him to devote his whole thought to the study of war and to historical research. Beyond the borders of France he

attained an increasing fame, but in his own country his tendency to analyse Napoleon's weaknesses, especially in the 1813 and 1815 campaigns, made his writings increasingly unpopular with the promoters of legend and the producers of the unhistorical panegyrics which served as textbooks for military education. These officially certified professors naturally did not encourage study of an author who challenged their superficial deductions, who brought out ugly facts which would kill their beautiful theory. Grouard was convinced that honesty was the essential attribute of history; they were persuaded that beauty came first.

The boycott became more intense when, in 1911, Grouard published a book which projected the truths drawn from the past on to the screen of the future. It would prove to be a remarkably accurate forecast of the German plan: "It is above all the offensive through Belgium on which we ought to fix our attention." And his masterly analysis of the courses open to the French would equally prove an all too prophetic warning of the dangers of the French plan that was actually attempted: "As far as one can foresee the logical consequences of the opening of our campaign, we can say without hesitation that if we take the offensive at the outset we shall be beaten, while in preparing ourselves for a riposte [against the western flank of the advancing Germans] all the chances are in our favour." Grouard's first prediction would be fulfilled in Lorraine and the Ardennes; his second on the Marne. But in their futile offensive the French leaders had dissipated the strength and the energy which might have made their riposte decisive.

A second true critic was Foch's old comrade, Mayer. As far back as 1890 he had predicted that the advent of smokeless powder and the improvement of firearms would lead to a "hide-and-seek" type of fighting—South Africa and Manchuria were to prove him correct—and had uttered warnings against the delusive charms of the "national offensive tradition."

His warnings had been not merely vain but partly unheard, for the French military journals closed their pages in oyster-like retreat from such questionings of the popular fallacy, and he had been driven to find vent in the *Revue Militaire Suisse*.

Ten years later, fortified by the evidence of the South African War, Mayer returned to the charge, and made the significant

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prediction that a future war would develop into a situation which merely

“ put face to face two human walls almost in contact, separated only by a strip of death, and this double wall will remain almost inert in spite of the will to advance on one side or the other, in spite of the attempts that will be made to push on.

“ One of these lines, baffled frontally, will try to outflank the other. That, in its turn, will extend its front ; there will be competition as to which can extend the most, so far as its resources allow. Or, at least, this would happen if it was possible to extend indefinitely. But nature presents obstacles. The line will come to a halt at the sea, at the mountains, at the frontier of a neutral country.”

The sequel would thus be a long drawn-out siege war, brought to an end by external circumstances, such as financial exhaustion, political negotiation, or the breaking of the war-weary home-front—the families of the fighting men.

“ They will grow tired of seeing the armies mark time without advancing, if not without suffering grievous losses. And it is that which will put an end to the campaign rather than the great victories of other times.”

This is remarkable prevision, for even if it is possible that Mayer had read the prophecies of the Polish banker, Mr. Bloch, his deductions were to prove more exact. They fit firstly the course of the Russo-Japanese War with its incomplete stabilisation, and then that of the World War.

Mayer has related that he sent a copy of his article to Foch. We do not need Mayer's assurance that it made no impression, for Foch's freedom from doubt and undisturbed serenity are manifest in his subsequently published books and their successively unchanged editions. But it is remarkable that Foch, fervent believer in his own gospel, should have rated contrary convictions so lightly that he could ask the man who held them to give his books a public blessing.

It is a coincident sidelight on his character that when Mayer challenged his fundamental theory with the criticism that it contained “ even more danger than fallacy,” Foch simply replied: “ Don't expect reproaches from me. You will always have my

unbroken friendship." Admirable, indeed, is such generosity and gentleness of spirit. These qualities do honour to Foch the man. But in turning the other cheek to the critic who assailed him he was also turning a deaf ear to the criticism. He was eager to forgive but unwilling to discuss. The possibility of his own fallibility was blandly ignored. For his doctrine was fortified by faith rather than by reason: even the concrete and steel of the frontier forts were more penetrable.

He was not so much deaf by nature, as deafened by his own act. The years that had brought increasing authority made him more and more the preacher. And his voice tended to drown his reflection. Like his future ally, Haig, but in a different sense, the opening of the mouth cut out the action of the brain. Unlike the political orator, he had no counteractive heckling to hold the door ajar. As his eloquence gathered impetus, his thick-set figure vibrated, his rather heavy features lightened, his speech quickened, his sentences shortened. He seemed to be driven by an inward dynamo which sent the strong, pulsating current of his creed into the mind of his hearers, stirring in them an emotional response so forceful that it shut off the more intellectual and analytical compartments of the mind. His appeal was, above all, to that part of the mind which is popularly called the heart. The spark was so strong that it obscured his obscurities of phrase, that it jumped across the gaps in his argument, that it made irrelevance appear to be sequence.

A man of action, speech was his mode of action. In it he was irresistible because he was insusceptible to doubt. Passionately convinced of his own convictions, his freedom from inward questioning quelled in others the liberty of questioning him. To understand Foch the soldier we must understand Foch the Catholic.

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The most concrete achievement of Foch's time as Commandant was not within the sphere of the Ecole de Guerre, but in an upward extension of its influence. One of the motives underlying his appointment, and a subject of discussion between Picquart and Millet, had been that of giving a higher intellectual training to the men who were likely to rise to high command, a training

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that would lift them out of the rut of peace-time routine and focus their minds on the wider questions of strategy.

Foch was enthusiastically in favour of the idea, if he conceived it more as a means of creating a band of chosen disciples who would carry his gospel into the higher commands of the Army. This idea seems to have determined the original form of the "Centre of Higher Military Studies," in which at the end of the normal Ecole de Guerre courses, fifteen of the students were selected for a third year's special instruction. After one year's trial the course was cancelled, on the ground that the officers were too immature to profit by it, but it was revived by conversion into a course for the pick of the battalion commanders and lieutenant-colonels.

This organ of advanced study which Foch created had early gained the nickname of the "School for Marshals." It was to be an academic substitute for the school of practical experience in which Napoleon's marshals had been trained. But the Napoleonic suggestion had for political palates a suspiciously imperialistic flavour, all the more pronounced perhaps because the rank of marshal had disappeared with the passing of the Second Empire. Thus the newly created school drew violent attacks. Less audible, but better founded were the military doubts as to its method of study. Was it to be a centre of free discussion and research, or merely a forcing house for the intensive cultivation of the authorised seeds of military thought, a means whereby "intellectual discipline" might be tightened among the higher commanders? In the outcome the last was certainly the effect, for good or ill.

On the credit side one item must certainly be placed. For its existence made possible the appointment as Foch's chief staff officer of a man who had not been through the Ecole de Guerre, a man whose presence at his side gave him ballast. If the *Centre des Hautes Etudes Militaires* had not been created, and thereby provided Weygand with a staff qualification, it is inconceivable that Foch would have found, when war came, his essential complement and right hand.

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Great as was the influence of Foch's appointment to the Ecole de Guerre upon the French Army, its most far-reaching effect

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was not in France but in England. There is no exaggeration in saying that it diverted the course of English history—because it revolutionised the traditional war policy of the island kingdom. This revolution can be traced to the personal influence of Foch on one Irishman.

### CHAPTER VI

#### TWO REVOLUTIONS

ONE morning early in December, 1909, a tall, angular, big-nosed Irishman, who humorously called himself "the ugliest man in the British Army," arrived at the door of the Ecole de Guerre. His name was Brigadier-General Henry Wilson; his post, that of Commandant of the Staff College at Camberley; his purpose, to study the methods of his French opposite number—and, not less, the man himself. For the name of Foch had become known in England. Each year the Senior Division students at the Staff College visited the battlefields of 1870, and Foch's partial analysis of this campaign in his books had proved useful to the instructors in working up the subject. Thus on Wilson's side there was an eager curiosity to meet the author. It was scarcely reciprocated. Foch had accepted rather than welcomed the proposed visit. He had little curiosity as to the British Army, a consequence partly of his limited study of military history if also because he shared the common Continental view that there was nothing to learn from the Boer War, and felt that an army which had been so baffled by mere burghers could not be worthy of serious attention.

Wilson was met by a couple of staff officers and led to the Commandant's house, where his first impression of Foch was of a rather contemptuous little man with an impolitely inattentive manner. After the morning had been spent in listening to lectures, Foch said good-bye to his visitor with a cordiality that conveyed relief. But Wilson replied that he would be returning

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after lunch. In the afternoon further lectures were followed by tea, and this, by an informal talk that stretched out over a couple of hours. A charm of manner that shone through the haze of his still imperfect French helped Wilson to thaw his host's manner, and Foch was thus the more agreeably resigned to Wilson's announcement of a return next day. This was to produce, significantly, an unreserved talk about combined action between the French and British Armies. It is also of historical note that Wilson made a diary note—"His appreciation of the German move through Belgium is exactly the same as mine, the important line being between Verdun and Namur." This note is evidence of Foch's foresight, for it suggests that in his opinion the Germans would seek a way round the fortified barrier of eastern France by traversing neutral territory. But it also suggests short-sight, in that Foch's gaze was fixed east of the Meuse, on Belgian Luxembourg rather than on the main plain of Belgium—through which in August, 1914, the wheeling mass of the German right wing made its passage.

The "entente," now "cordiale," between the two men imperceptibly developed into an alliance. In January Wilson paid a fresh visit to the Ecole de Guerre. Callwell, the editor of his diaries, points to this visit as the probable occasion when Wilson put the leading question: "What would you say was the smallest British force that would be of any practical assistance to you in the event of a contest such as we have been considering?" To this Foch instantly replied: "A single private soldier; and we would take good care that he was killed."

If this retort, witty but profound, suggests that Foch had gauged the national character of Britain, her mingled pride and tenacity, it also suggests that he regarded the British Regular Army as chiefly a lever by which he could throw the whole weight of the British nation into the scales of the Continental balance. And to this purpose he bound Wilson as a devoted servant. The influence of Wilson's charm on Foch may have been the earlier to be exerted, but that of Foch went further and was the stronger.

A first symptom was that Wilson introduced Ecole de Guerre practices into the conduct of tactical schemes at Camberley. His imagination had been fired by the way the French instructors

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sought to create the rush and stress of battle conditions by cries of "Vite ! Vite !" and "Allez ! Allez !" to spur the students towards quick solutions. Transplanted to England, the method came to be distinguished from the past chiefly by the words "Allez ! Allez !" being put at the head of the schemes, a title irreverently transformed into "Ally Sloper schemes."

In June Foch paid a return visit, his first visit to England, Wilson met him with a car at Farnborough Station, took him to see a small field exercise on the Aldershot training areas, then round the barracks, back to the Staff College, and to tea with Lord Roberts. "The chief and Foch made great friends, neither understanding a word each other said." Each of these two men, dynamic if small, responded to the other's force of character.

Probably also, Foch's appreciation was enhanced because at this time Roberts was on the full tide of his campaign for compulsory service, which alone would provide the scale of Army that Foch desired to see alongside the French.

Next day Wilson met Foch at Andover, whence they made a tour of the camps on Salisbury Plain, and on the following morning Wilson drove to London to escort Foch to the War Office. After lunch they visited the museum and library of the Royal United Service Institution. Sir Arthur Leetham, then secretary, has told the story how, his door suddenly thrown open, Wilson walked in and enthusiastically said, "I've got a French general outside, General Foch, boss of their Staff College, whom I want to introduce you to. And mark my words, Leetham, this fellow's going to command the Allied Armies when the big war comes on." The remark is notable not merely as prophecy, but as indicating Wilson's view of Franco-British strategic relationship in the future alliance. The Royal United Service Institution is housed in the Banqueting Hall of the old Whitehall Palace, and from it Charles I had walked out on to the scaffold where his head would be cut off. The cynical may perhaps see a symbolism in the fact of Wilson's walking out from the same building—with Foch.

It is significant also that in July Wilson was visited by Lord Kitchener, just returned from India, who, in Wilson's words, "attacked me about trying to form a 'school of thought.'"



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Kitchener seemingly feared the evolution of a doctrine into a dogma, to the excommunication of free thought.

In August Wilson left Camberley for the War Office to take up the key post of Director of Military Operations. He at once left for France, where he intended to accompany Foch on a staff exercise. But it was interrupted by a summons to Foch, who had been chosen to attend the manœuvres of the Russian Army. However, in October Wilson again travelled to Paris, to attend the wedding of Foch's daughter. To those who know the domestic reserve of the French, especially the French officer, this invitation reveals the rapid growth of intimacy between the two men.

On the morning after, they turned to business. Wilson's diary records of Foch: "He tells me that the Russian army is getting on, but very slowly; . . . he says that he doesn't think Russia would actively interfere if Germany and France were to fight about Belgium, but Russia would do all her possible if war broke out through the Balkans, . . . he believes Germany will absorb Belgium peacefully and throw the onus of war on France, and, in short, Foch is of opinion that, in the coming war in Belgium, France must trust to England and not to Russia, and that all our plans must be worked out in minutest detail so that we may be quite clear of the action and the line to take."

The last clause deserves emphasis. If some of the members of the British Cabinet had seen Wilson's diary they might have had a shock.

For the next link in the chain, the chain that made the Entente a bond, we must turn to the evidence of Huguet, the French Military Attaché in London. In January, 1906, Mr. Haldane, the Secretary of State for War, had given permission for the Director of Military Operations, Grierson, to discuss with Huguet the problem of possible military co-operation. But when, in July, Grierson was succeeded by Ewart, an extremely cautious and reticent officer, the conversations flagged. During his four years of office Ewart did not once discuss the subject with Huguet, and such fitful study as continued was left to his subordinates. Further, there was a change of opinion as to the site of British action. While the French wished the British Expeditionary Force to join up with their armies in France, the British General Staff was in favour of sending it to Belgium

where it could operate against the Germans' flank. Because of this difference of views, and a general indifference in high places, the minutes of the negotiations were more contradictory than conclusive.

When Wilson came to the War Office in 1910, he found only shadowy arrangements for co-operation on paper. And nothing beyond paper. Since 1904 the internal reconstruction of the Army had absorbed attention. No actual measures had been taken, nor time-table made, for the transport of the Expeditionary Force across the Channel. Huguet took an early opportunity to complain to Wilson of the inadequate steps taken to put this important question on a proper basis. Wilson's response was gratifying: "Important question! It is vital. There is no other!"

The answer is a tribute to Wilson's energy, and contained a promise that was soon fulfilled by steps to bring the mobilisation time-table into accord with the French time and scheme of concentration, to hasten the progress of mobilisation in consequence, and to fix the train and port arrangements.

But the answer is also witness to Wilson's narrowness of view. And through this narrowness, which shut out the historic broad horizon of British war policy, he made the war effort of Britain an appendix to the war plan of France. The ties might be of silk, but silk is inelastic. And, although each strand might seem fragile, by multiplying them he gave them an unbreakable strength.

Hitherto, British preparations had been devoted to the reorganisation of the Army, and the correction of the faults revealed in South Africa, leaving the movement and destination of the troops to be arranged when an emergency came. If this policy was opportunistic, perhaps also short-sighted, and entailed a characteristic delay in exerting Britain's force, it allowed the use of judgment in the use of that force.

In contrast, the very completeness of the preparations sponsored by Henry Wilson decreed the manner and direction in which the power of Britain should be used. That decree was made absolute by the omission of any alternative arrangements.

The absence of an alternative is contrary not merely to the profoundest lesson of war but to the very nature of war. It sins against the light which Bourcet shed by his most penetrating

dictum that "every plan of campaign ought to have several branches and to have been so well thought out that one or other of the said branches cannot fail of success." This was the light that his military heir, Napoleon, followed in seeking always, as he said, to "*faire son thème en deux façons*." In any problem where an opposing force exists, and cannot be regulated, one must foresee and provide for alternative courses. Adaptability is the law which governs survival in war as in life, war being but a concentrated form of the human struggle against environment.

Militarily, Henry Wilson's arrangements committed the British Expeditionary Force to the rôle of left wing of the French armies, and thereby "landed" Britain on the Continent, ensuring that she would have to break with tradition, conscript the manhood of the nation into the Army, and place the weight of that national Army in France.

Politically, the greatest effect of his arrangements was to occur even earlier. For in the first days of August, 1914, their suddenly realised completeness, enhanced by fixity, formed a bond which the Cabinet felt hopeless to loosen without treason to France. It was a rope round the neck of British policy. The Cabinet might still hesitate, but at any motion to draw back the restraint of the collar made itself felt. It could only be eased by going forward. Hence the abrupt change from reluctance to acquiescence when the German invasion of Belgium provided a justifiable chance to go forward—to war.

Well might Foch, soon after first acquaintance, come to address Wilson as "Henri."

How far Wilson foresaw the full consequence of his newly cemented ties is uncertain. That if he had foreseen them he would have desired to forgo them is unlikely. But the peculiarly one-sided blindness with which he made the contact is shown by numerous sidelights. It is as late as September, 1911, when this entry appears in his diary: "Huguet came to see me. . . . He told me where the French General Staff wants us to go, and what their plans are. This is the first time I have been told." There is unconscious irony in the sentence that follows: "He told me also that if I had gone to the manœuvres, M. Messimy was himself going to have invested me with the collar of the Legion of Honour." "Collar" seems a peculiarly apt, if not exact, rendering of *cravate*.

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Wilson's attachment to the cause of France and *La Revanche* grew so strong under the stimulus of Foch that it came to resemble the blindly passionate devotion of a romantic lover. On his next visit to the 1870 battlefields round Metz he performed a self-dedicatory act which he records thus: "We paid my usual visit to the statue of 'France,' looking as beautiful as ever, so I laid at her feet a small bit of map I have been carrying showing the areas of concentration of the British Forces on her territory."

He went back to England to throw himself with renewed zest and zeal into his self-appointed task of persuading the Government "of the necessity of an alliance with France," and also if possible of the need for conscription—in order to make this alliance militarily adequate to French desires. In pursuing his mission, spurred on by hearing that "Foch is sure of war in the spring" (of 1912), he sought to inveigle and not merely to persuade the Cabinet into a course which "the wasters," as he called them, feared as likely to compromise their independence and peace policy. If he failed to obtain an actual pledge, he pledged them morally to an extent which they only realised in the critical days of late July, 1914.

Wilson's visits to France multiplied, and he lost no opportunity for receiving fresh injections of Fochian serum. For this purpose, he had now to travel further afield than Paris. For in 1911, Foch, on promotion to general of division, had left the Ecole de Guerre to take up command of the 13th Infantry Division. Curiously his headquarters were in the barracks at Chaumont, which six years later were to be occupied by the General Headquarters of the American Expeditionary Force. This post was but a stepping-stone to a higher one, for in October of the following year he received command of the VIII Army Corps at Bourges. Thither Wilson went in February, 1913, and the discussion that he records is a curious reflection on history and on military wisdom.

He had first been to Paris to meet General Joffre, now the Commander-in-Chief designate of the French Army for war, and his abler coadjutor Castelnau. "My talk with Castelnau and Joffre was about Repington's recent articles in *The Times*, where he claims that our Navy is worth 500,000 bayonets to the French at the decisive point. I had written to Fred Oliver that

our Navy was not worth 500 bayonets. Castelnau and Joffre did not value it at one bayonet! Except from the moral point." Then Wilson went on to Bourges, where, he found, "Foch is exactly of the same opinion. . . ."

In the light of history, of all history, not merely that of 1914-18, this view seems unbelievably limited. How could men professing to be strategists don such narrowly military blinkers? It is deplorable that the holder of the post in the War Office most directly concerned with strategic problems should have ignored the influence of sea-power and the part played by economic and political factors in the history of his country's wars. But it is even more symptomatic of military culture that the members of a General Staff which had spent forty years in unprecedentedly intensive research to discover the historical recipe for victory should have been so ignorant of the wider experiences of war. Had they focused their eyes so hard on Napoleon that, like a man who gazes at a bright light, they became blinded? Perhaps another simile defines the effect even more exactly. It is that by prolonged concentration of the vision on one spot, Napoleon, they had hypnotised themselves. And, aside from such wider questions as that of blockade, the military doctrine and plan evolved during the prologue to 1914 suggests a state of hypnotic trance as the only credible explanation.

The climax of the prologue was the crisis in the French high command, which was in turn a repercussion of the international crisis of 1911. When the otherwise pacific German Foreign Minister, Kiderlen-Wächter, despatched a gunboat to Agadir as a means of "encouraging" France to grant concessions in Africa, he certainly did not realise how far the ripples, caused by this pebble that he dropped into the pool of European politics, would spread. The act not merely brought war closer than many more flagrant provocations, but when the turmoil subsided it left an ineffaceable sense of the inevitability of war. In Germany diplomacy was weakened and public opinion rallied to support a further increase in the German Navy. Abroad it consolidated the Entente between France and Britain, and gave to this tenuous link a tenacious strength that made its future severance difficult.

In France, the danger so aroused the Government that, in

recoil from it, the military were given a licence of which they had long been deprived for fear of a *coup d'état*. They used it to achieve a *coup d'état* within the Army. And, ironically, the result was to smooth the way for the German armies in 1914. So that "Agadir" served its instigators in a better way than they could ever have conceived!

The military revolt, none the less destructive because it was waged with tongues instead of arms, found its leader and prophet in Lieut.-Colonel de Grandmaison—Foch's prize pupil. Now risen to be head of the Operations branch of the General Staff, he was thus Henry Wilson's opposite number. These two men were each to dig a pitfall for their own country.

In the existing plan of campaign to meet a German invasion, the French armies were distributed in depth—forming a T-shaped strategic pattern—so that they could be manœuvred against the enemy according to the line of invasion that he followed. The strategy was thus of a defensive-offensive nature—to let the enemy show his hand and then, through the elasticity of the French formation, to throw a powerful "mass of manœuvre" against him. While the strategy was initially defensive the tactics were not. The intention was not so much to break the enemy's impetus by a stubborn defence, preparatory to a counterstroke, as to shake him with a frontal blow at one point and then to overthrow him with a heavier blow on his flank. The plan, which certainly ensured elasticity, trusted to superior movement for its success rather than to a combination of ground—prepared for defence—and movement.

But to Grandmaison this plan, even, was contrary to the French spirit and constituted "an almost complete atrophy of the idea of the offensive." Grandmaison argued that, instead of waiting for the enemy to disclose his move, he should be attacked. "An adversary assailed sharply and at all points simultaneously thinks of warding off the blows; he is immobilised and becomes rapidly incapable of any serious offensive. It is the quickness with which we engage the enemy that guarantees us against surprise, and the force of the attack which secures us against the enemy's manœuvres." He epitomised his theory by saying: "We must not recoil before this principle, of which only the form seems paradoxical: in the offensive, imprudence is the best of safeguards." The conclusion was that, whatever

the rôle of a force, there was only one mode of action, attack—which in application meant a headlong assault.

This theory, which really rested on the sentimental assumption that Frenchmen were braver than Germans, certainly simplified the rôle of the leader. For directly an enemy was sighted he had merely to give the order "Forward!" General Boucher has related that, when the doctrine gained sway over the peace exercises of the Army, any officer who did not thus charge with lowered head was deemed to be lacking in "nerve." The strategy of the bull had replaced that of the matador.

The simplicity of the theory combined with its appeal to the French temperament—and its implicit tribute to the irresistible spirit of Frenchmen—to capture the imagination of the Army. In the young who would have to stake their own lives criticism of the folly may be tempered by admiration of its superb audacity. But in commanders and staff officers responsible for others' lives it was wholly culpable. On behalf of the generals the excuse may be pleaded that they were afraid of the charge that their nerve was failing through age increasing. It is harder for an officer to accept a certain sacrifice of his own career than a potential sacrifice of men's lives.

Grandmaison actually raised his standard of revolt in the hall where he gave two successive lectures before an audience that embraced most of the higher commanders and the General Staff. And he had taken care to win them over to his ideas beforehand by sedulous propaganda. Only one man of authority stood out against the flowing tide. This was General Michel, who, as Vice-President of the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre*, was the Commander-in-Chief designate in case of war. But under the existing system, imposed by Parliament to curtail the former power of the Army, his prospective office did not give him power to control the General Staff and its doctrine. As Michel was in a minority of one, the "Young Turks" carried the issue. For, dominating the General Staff, they were firmly entrenched in the Ministry of War, where the political chief, the President of the Council, was a bird of passage, and the Vice-President an outsider.

Michel was the real target of the "Young Turks." He had precipitated the crisis by bringing forward a fresh plan of campaign. This was designed to meet a double hypothesis—that the

Germans would violate Belgian neutrality, and march not only east of the Meuse, but west of it through the Belgian plain; that they would seek to develop an overwhelming superiority by using both active and reserve corps in the attack. To meet this double danger, Michel proposed to stand on the defensive along the east or Lorraine frontier, and to place the bulk of his forces facing the north or Belgian frontier. As this meant doubling the length of his front, he further proposed to double up reserve with active regiments in the first line.

The suggested intermixture horrified most of the professional officers. Even the existing plan was based on a mobility and manœuvring power of which, they said, only well-trained troops were capable. There was much sense in their contention.

The intermixture foreseen by Michel was carried so far down the scale that the general brake on mobility might offset the increase of quantity. But reservists endowed, as they would be, with modern weapons certainly have great stopping power in defence. Thus they could form a shield for the swordsman, a stout covering behind and beyond which the active troops could manœuvre. If the Germans dared to use reserve divisions for the original attack, how much more safely might the French risk using them in parrying it.

But Michel's proposal had no chance of amendment. It was given no hearing. And Michel, thrown down by all his colleagues on the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre*, was compelled to resign by the new Minister of War, Messimy.

Who should succeed him? The "Young Turks" only desire was that it should be someone complacent, for they felt competent to manage the Army—on a limited company basis. Galliéni, the famous pacifier of Madagascar, might have had the succession. But he had indicted Michel, owing largely to his distrust of reserve troops, and he was too scrupulous to draw personal profit from the result. Messimy then asked him for alternative names. He suggested, first, Pau, an intellectually qualified soldier, and then Joffre, who had built fortifications for him in Madagascar, and was now intended to take charge of the lines of communication if war came.

Pau was offered the post, but when he demanded increased powers the Government remembered his clerical opinions and suspected him of dictatorial ambitions. So Joffre was chosen.



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and the War Minister, addressing an audience of journalists, declared: "With General Joffre . . . I shall strive to develop the doctrine of the offensive with which our Army is beginning to be impregnated."

Joffre was known to be a good republican and devoid of political attachments. Heavy in body and intellect, he was obviously no Cassius. Thus the Government did not fear to alter the system and give him the dual functions of Vice-President of the Council and Chief of the General Staff. The combination endowed him with control in peace and command in war. And another combination promptly took charge of the endowment. Joffre's slow wits, combined with his inexperience of advanced war studies, made him a modern Delphic oracle, the mouthpiece of a military priesthood among whom Grandmaison was the actual augur and General de Castelnau the officiating high priest. For, with amusing illogicality, Joffre's ignorance of strategy had been officially recognised by the nomination of Castelnau as his assistant and Chief-of-Staff in the event of war. The Government was too distrustful of Castelnau's clerical sympathies to give him control of the Army, yet trusted him with control of the Commander-in-Chief.

The oracle lost no time in announcing the new code. "The French Army, returning to its traditions, no longer knows any other law than the offensive. . . . All attacks are to be pushed to the extreme with the firm resolution to charge the enemy with the bayonets, in order to destroy him. . . . This result can only be obtained at the price of bloody sacrifices. Any other conception ought to be rejected as contrary to the very nature of war."

This contrasts significantly with the note which Napoleon had struck during the wonderful campaign of 1805 which culminated at Austerlitz: "All my care will be to gain victory with the least possible shedding of blood; my soldiers are my children." How different, as an inspiration to commanders and men, from the words of the new oracle! And all the more curious because this oracle claimed and believed itself to be the reincarnation of Napoleon, in direct apostolic succession.

How can we explain the mutilation? Perhaps best by repeating the words of Foch: "As for my book, it is a work of faith rather than of science." Faith selects the evidence that

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suits it, where science weighs all. There is no quotation, no hint even, in Foch's books of Napoleon's 1805 declaration. But neither is there any consideration of the Ulm campaign, Napoleon's most bloodless triumph of strategy, nor of Austerlitz, Napoleon's most illustrious victory in battle. Austerlitz was an example of the defensive-offensive, resistance followed by a riposte. It did not fit into the theory that "in strategy as in tactics, one attacks."

After recasting the official doctrine in an imitation that was a travesty of Napoleon's, the next step of Grandmaison and his school was to make ready the human sacrifice. To this end they went back beyond Napoleon to the Frederician model in training the troops, and aimed at a discipline of the muscles, not of the intelligence, sacrificing initiative in order, by an incessant repetition, "to develop in the soldier the reflexes of obedience." The new tactical regulations were really framed for a battlefield of bayonets, not of bullets.

The dream structure was completed by a new plan, the now notorious Plan XVII, which visualised an early general offensive in which all the available active forces were to hurl themselves on the German armies, striking immediately successive right- and left-hand blows. These, it was apparently presumed, would inevitably smash the enemy, whatever his strength. For the plan looked no further ahead. As a masterpiece of strategy it had certainly a delightful simplicity, if it did not require the simplicity of genius to devise it. It is a proverb of fashion that simplicity is costly, but, without taking account of the ultimate cost of execution, one may feel that even for the conception an expensive body of designers on a life contract was unnecessary. It was the sort of plan that the humblest *poilu* would have provided in return for a pint of *vin ordinaire*.

\* \* \* \* \*

While the seeds which Foch had sown at the Ecole de Guerre were producing these green shoots, he himself was ploughing fresh furrows as a commander of troops. For once, a theorist received prompt and full recompense. He had only been at Bourges a year when, in September, 1913, he was transferred to the command of the XX Army Corps, the most prized of the army corps commands because it formed the spearhead of the

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French Army. One of its divisions, the 11th, was known as the "iron division"; the other claimed that it would prove the "steel division."

Thus Foch came to the Nancy command. Whether or not he remembered Millet's warning, his appointment certainly revived an earlier memory. He ordered for the day of his entry—August 23, 1913—a grand musical "retreat" in which the massed bands of the garrison took part. With a torrent of sound he drowned the discordant fanfares of Manteuffel. In the words of his ardent biographer, Louis Madelin, "a small revenge compared with what he meditated and was about to consummate." Yet, in his own mind hope burned low, even though desire never flagged. "I had been expecting war for the last forty years, but I was beginning to think that I should end my days without having seen it."

Like his predecessors in the command, Foch's physical presence at Nancy, directly facing the German frontier, tended to the concentration of his mind on that potential battlefield. But with him this came as a practical corrective to a mystical habit of mind. And one of its firstfruits was his appreciation of the importance of the Grand-Couronné, the name given to the chain of heights which forms a natural rampart across the approaches to Nancy. It had been left unfortified because it was deemed to project dangerously in front of the line of frontier fortresses that ran from Verdun through Toul and Epinal to Belfort.

General Cherfils has related that its hurried organisation for defence, of momentous effect, was due to the efforts of Foch. "He had the defences constructed with the means at his disposal without waiting for an allotment from the military budget." Exactly one year after the "retreat" that triumphantly hailed Foch's entry into Nancy, that musical memory was itself drowned in the echoes of a grimmer kind of retreat, a recoil upon Nancy of the force that had dashed to the headlong assault of the German positions. In that unforeseen calamity, the defences of the Grand Couronné were a means of salvation. How strange that Foch, the peace-time prophet of the offensive, should have retrieved its ill-consequences by his attention to means of defence during his last lap in command before the war came. Characteristically, his efforts were inspired by an offen-

sive purpose—that of providing a secure spring-board for his jump forward when Plan XVII was put into operation.

In fairness, it should be added that, as he had no share in making the offensive plan of campaign, so also his doctrine of the offensive had been pressed to an extreme by his former disciples who now governed the military mind of France. The teaching of Foch, indeed, was *démodé* on the eve of the war. To Grandmaison and his staff associates, Foch's emphasis on *sûreté*, and inference that temporary defence might play a part in it, seemed a want of faith in the irresistible *élan* of the French soldier.

To this loosening of influence over the rising generation of staff officers his own manner contributed. His treatment of war had tended to become more mystical as he became more senior, and he was fond of speaking in parables which were difficult to fathom. Once, at a conference after an exercise, his summing up consisted of one vehement sentence hurled at a commander: "If you arrive at the station two or three minutes after the train has gone, you miss it!" He rarely stooped to explain or elaborate, and allowed no deviation from his own views. Among the more senior officers he neither sought nor commonly attained popularity, while to the junior and the men he was simply a symbol. Even if he was aware that some of his mystified subordinates declared him to be insane, he did not care, for he was more concerned to generate "will" than to foster understanding. To him *morale* was the offspring of his own soul, and, sure of that, he was content.

As a symbol, he was revered, at least among the instinctively hero-worshipping young officers, if not always by the more sophisticated members of the General Staff. One of the former, Captain Dubarle, has left an interesting record of his impression of Foch when attached to the "iron division" for exercises early in July, 1914. "What strikes one first is his bright, penetrating glance, full of intelligence, but, in spite of that great energy, still luminous. This light in his eye spiritualises a face that otherwise would be almost brutal, with its heavy moustache and protruding jaw. When he speaks, drawing lessons from the exercises, he becomes extraordinarily animated, almost passionate . . . he points out the principles of warfare, castigates faults, makes an appeal to one's best energies,





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all in the same brief and contained style. He is a priest who judges, condemns, and teaches in the name of a dogma that inspires him, and to which he has devoted all the strength of his *mind* and heart. General Foch is a prophet inspired by his God."

Foch through a magnifying-glass ! The very exaggeration of youth's admiring lens brings out the essential features of the portrait more prominently for the analytical eye.

Dubarle's letter, to his parents, was written on July 5th, 1914. That same day the Kaiser gave a blank cheque to the Austrian envoy, the promise that Austria "could depend on the complete support of Germany." "In the Kaiser's opinion there must be no delay. . . . If it was to come to a war between Austria-Hungary and Russia she could be assured that Germany would stand at her side."

On July 19th the Austro-Hungarian Council of Ministers approved Berchtold's draft ultimatum to Serbia. That morning a familiar figure in unfamiliar civilian clothes emerged from the station at Morlaix, and stepped out briskly on the road to Ploujean. Charles Le Goffic, one of those who after the war cast himself for the rôle of Boswell to Foch's Johnson, supplies the appropriate comment of the station lounge: "Hullo ! General Foch is home again. . . . That's all right ! The war isn't coming this time."

Foch had come back on leave to Treufeunteuniou for the last time in the world as it was. Thither also his two sons-in-law, Captain Fournier of the General Staff and Captain Bécourt of the 26th Chasseurs à Pied, had come to join him with their wives and children. The fact that he had only taken a fortnight's leave may perhaps suggest that he was less assured of peace than Le Goffic's observant lounge.

On July 26th a telegram was brought out to his country retreat, summoning him urgently back to Nancy. For forty years he had dreamed of this moment. All that time he had concentrated his mind on the *Revanche* to which, like the youthful Hannibal, he had dedicated himself. Unlike Hannibal, he was sixty-two when the chance of self-fulfilment came.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE LAUNCHING OF THE WAR

At eleven o'clock in the morning of July 28th Austria's declaration of war was delivered in Belgrade. Strange coincidence that the World War was to begin as it was to end at the eleventh hour—the hour that is symbolic of urgent action. And from that hour the spirit of urgency reigned supreme, to the abdication of reasoned, forethoughtful judgment. The ruling impulse of the General Staffs was to start their war-machines lest they be left behind by rival drivers. The statesmen were assigned and too easily accepted a back place, urged to this seat by the plea of military necessity. Already in Austria, Conrad von Hötzendorf, Chief of the General Staff, enjoyed the sombre distinction of having been the prime instigator of war against Serbia.

Now, at the news of Austria's declaration, Russia's General Staff develop a pressure too strong for Sazonov to resist. They assert that their machine is fitted only for general, not for partial, mobilisation, and the statesman is helpless to controvert such "technical reasons." The *ukase* is placarded on the morning of July 31st. A few hours later the Austrian order for general mobilisation is given. The day before, the Austrians had received from Moltke, the Chief of the German General Staff, the message: "Decline the renewed advances of Great Britain in the interests of peace. A European War is the last chance of saving Austria-Hungary. Germany is ready to back Austria unreservedly." This stimulating message had been followed by a telegram direct to Conrad: "Mobilise at once against Russia. Germany will mobilise." In this way Moltke counteracted the temporising telegrams of his own statesman, Bethmann-Hollweg.

In Berlin a "state of danger of war," the veiled first step of mobilisation, was proclaimed on July 31st, and ultimatums were dispatched not only to St. Petersburg but to Paris. The ultimatum to Russia, demanding instant suspension of all military measures, was followed by a formal declaration of war as soon as the twelve hours' grace elapsed. The ultimatum to France demanded to know whether she would remain neutral "in a Russo-German War," and added the menace "Mobilisation will



inevitably mean war." When the German Ambassador called for his answer next day, he received the curtly dignified reply that "France would act as her interests required." Before nightfall the order for mobilisation was issued both in France and in Germany.

But in France the Government could still override "military necessity." On July 30th an unwilling General Staff had been ordered to withdraw the frontier forces to a line ten kilometres inside the frontier. The commanders on the frontier, however, exercised their discretion in minimising the military risk of such a withdrawal. In some cases they reduced the ten kilometres to four. And on mobilisation Joffre's strong protest induced the Government to rescind the order.

German patrols had, indeed, infringed the frontier as early as the 30th and again on the 31st. But the German declaration of war was delayed until August 3rd, through a far-fetched assumption, fostered by the Ambassador in London, that if Germany refrained from attack on France, England would remain neutral and guarantee the passivity of France while Russia was being crushed. The delusion at least produced a significant illustration of the incapacity of the military chiefs to regulate the machine they had created. The Kaiser exclaimed to Moltke—"We march, then, with all our forces, only towards the East." Moltke replied "that this was impossible. The advance of armies formed of millions of men . . . was the result of years of painstaking work. Once planned, it could not possibly be changed." The Kaiser bitterly retorted: "Your uncle would have given me a different answer." He gave way to Moltke's insistence on continuing the concentration against France, but placed a twenty-four-hour brake on the actual crossing of the frontier. Even this so shook the bulky frame of Moltke that he pathetically recorded: "It was a great shock to me, as though something had struck at my heart." However, the strain was relieved by the convenient gap that commonly occurs between the issue of orders and their execution: that day some of his advanced troops had entered neutral Luxembourg, actually in advance of time-table.

Next day, August 2nd, German troops occupied Luxembourg in force and in the evening the long-prepared ultimatum to Belgium was delivered demanding the free passage required by

the war plan that was still longer prepared—since 1905. While the threat hardened Belgium to resist the violation of her neutrality, it put an end to the indecisions of the British Cabinet, torn between desire for peace and the ties of the Entente with France. An ultimatum that Germany should respect Belgian neutrality was delivered. German strategy had rescued British policy from an uncertainty—of certain damage. At the eleventh hour of the evening of August 4th England's ultimatum expired, in Berlin. German troops had already begun the invasion of Belgium.

They were uncorking the long-matured Schlieffen Plan, which was to be christened, with bitter irony, "Schlieffen-and-water" when the consequences of Moltke's modifications were seen. He himself, as swollen in frame as his famous uncle had been spare, might aptly be termed "Moltke-and-sawdust."

The elder Moltke, a shrewd realist, had not been carried away by the apparent ease of his triumph in 1870. He had gauged the fundamental lessons better than his French critics. He had so well calculated the growth of material obstacles, due to the improvement of weapons and the development of the French fortifications, that he regarded a rapid decision as an impracticable ideal. In his plan of 1877, for a two-front war, he had contemplated a heavy blow against France as a first step, with the hope, not of reaching Paris, but of inducing the French to negotiate; and then switching his forces to the East. Two years later he turned his face more definitely to the East as the only practicable direction of attack. He decided to stand on the defensive in the West with four and a half corps while he launched fourteen corps in an offensive against Warsaw. To this plan he adhered until his retirement in 1888.

His successor, Waldersee, came to the same conclusion—that the new French dispositions and fortifications made an attack too unfavourable to be risked. But Waldersee soon fell from power owing to his tactlessness in allowing the Kaiser to be defeated in the army manœuvres. Thus in 1891 Schlieffen succeeded to the office of Chief of the General Staff, and to the problem. Like his predecessors, he found it insoluble. But he was a fervid devotee of Clausewitz, and pressed to its logical extreme the doctrine that military success cancelled all other factors. He was so convinced that the main enemy army must

be not merely defeated but annihilated, that he convinced himself that such a complete result was possible. He applied himself assiduously to the study of military history, but only to find examples to support his thesis. And in taking Cannæ as both his model and his aim, he exaggerated its offensive form.

As he was practical enough to realise that the fortress region on the Lorraine frontier was no suitable arena for such a drama, he sought an alternative course, where offensive manœuvre would have more scope. Thus, unlike his predecessors, he made policy the servant of strategy, and committed Germany to the political risks of a detour through Belgium. In his first plan he sought to curtail them by merely advancing through Belgian Luxembourg, presumably hoping the proverbial excuse for the illegitimate baby, that it was "only a small one," would cover this violation of neutrality. But, as finally formulated in 1905, the plan was extended, with an extension of its affront and risks, to embrace the heart of Belgium.

The mass of the German forces was to be concentrated on the right or western wing for a gigantic wheel, while the left wing, facing the French frontier, was designedly reduced to the slenderest possible size. The right wing would pivot on the fortified area Metz-Thionville, and, traversing a vast arc through Belgium and Northern France, would wheel gradually east, to press the French back towards the Moselle, where they would be hammered on the anvil formed by the Lorraine fortresses and the Swiss frontier. In this wheel the extreme right wing would pass west of Paris and cross the Seine near Rouen.

The swinging mass would comprise fifty-three divisions, while to the secondary army on the left wing were allotted only eight divisions. Its very weakness was of great potential promise in easing the path of the massive right wing. For if the French took the offensive and pressed the German left wing back towards the Rhine, the further they pressed on the more difficult would it be for them to parry the thrust through Belgium against their flank and rear. Like a revolving door, if they threw their weight against one leaf, the sooner and more forcibly would the other leaf swing round and strike them in the back.

Here lay the real subtlety of the plan, not merely in the geographical detour. There is a doubt how far Schlieffen conceived this reaction as a deliberate trap, how far the influence of

Clausewitz obscured the deduction from Hannibal. For Groener has divulged that "in forming his plan Schlieffen took as basis that the French would stand on the defensive, as then seemed probable." But Schlieffen was certainly willing, like the elder Moltke before him, to take the risk that the French might advance as far as the Rhine.

The French plan of 1914 fitted into Schlieffen's plan with a neatness beyond conception. It was the one thing needed to make the Schlieffen plan perfect. The French, forswearing the advantage of their own fortified barrier, were to rush headlong on the enemy's, thus enabling the Germans to offer resistance on the sector that suited them, while striking in the sector which the French had left exposed.

Unfortunately for Germany, the younger Moltke had modified Schlieffen's idea through lacking the courage of his calculations. While Schlieffen, dying, murmured, "It must come to a fight. Only make the right wing strong," Moltke bolstered up the left wing. Of the nine divisions which became available between 1905 and 1914 he allotted eight to the left wing and only one to the right. And in the critical days of execution he would displace the proportions even more to the detriment of the right wing.

One of the great surprises in store for the French was the German scheme of using Landwehr and Ersatz troops in the initial offensive, a surprise again made more effective by the French disregard of reservists—through discounting their value.

But although Moltke had intended to use his six Ersatz divisions to reinforce his right wing, when the time came he diverted them to the left. In consequence, seven active divisions were dropped from the right wing in its march—to watch Antwerp and to invest Maubeuge and Givet. And on August 25th, after the first encounter with the French near Charleroi, another four divisions were subtracted from the right wing when the Russian invasion of East Prussia looked momentarily menacing. This subtraction was due, however, to self-delusion, not merely lack of moral courage. For the excuse afterwards given was that Moltke and his Staff thought that the decisive victory on the right wing was already won! Too late to be of use in the East where the victory of Tannenberg had annulled the Russian threat, these divisions were too soon in leaving the West.

No want of courage could be imputed to the French plan. Here the fault was due to a belief in the supremacy of mind over matter, which in reality proved the subordination of mind to mirage. Based on the idea of an immediate offensive "with all forces united," Plan XVII ordained an attack by the First (Dubail) and Second (Castelnau) Armies in Lorraine, towards the Saar. These formed Joffre's right fist. His left fist was formed of the Third Army (Ruffey) opposite Metz and the Fifth Army (Lanrezac) facing the Ardennes. Their rôle was either to take the offensive between Metz and the Luxembourg frontier near Thionville, or, if the Germans came through neutral territory, to strike at their inner flank. In that case, the Fourth Army (Langle de Cary), held in strategic reserve near the centre, would reinforce the left fist. Two groups of reserve divisions were placed in rear of the two extreme flanks—their rearward position geographically expressed the military opinion upon their capacity.

More far-reaching for ill than these dispositions was the double miscalculation of force and space on which they were based. Before war came, the French Intelligence at least recognised the possibility that the Germans might use their reserve divisions at the outset, and on this hypothesis estimated that they could deploy in the West a possible 68 divisions. Actually they deployed the equivalent of  $83\frac{1}{2}$ , counting Landwehr and Ersatz troops. But when war came, and the armies were assembling, the French Intelligence lost sight of the hypothesis, and counted only the active divisions in its estimate of the enemy strength.

As for the miscalculation of space, although Plan XVII recognised the possibility of a German move through Belgium, the wideness of its sweep was absurdly underestimated. The Germans, it was expected, would take the difficult route through the Ardennes—presumably to make it easy for the French to cut their communications. Nor did enlightenment as to their own delusions come quickly to Joffre and his Staff. On August 6th, when the German guns were bombarding the outer defences of Liège, which obstructed their path to the central plain of Belgium, Joffre complaisantly informed the French Armies: "It may be concluded that the Germans are executing a plan of concentration, drawn up two years ago, of which we have know-

ledge." The reference was to a document found, according to the General Staff story, by a French officer in the lavatory of his railway carriage when travelling in Germany the year before ! Thus in blind ignorance and supreme disdain for the enemy's moves, the French offensive was launched.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE BLIND COLLISION

VITRY-LE-FRANÇOIS, a dusty little town on the banks of the Marne, had been awakened from its habitual slumbers to find itself the hub of France. A hundred years ago its hibernating peace had been violently broken by the inroad of Blücher's Prussians, and as abruptly retrieved by one of the last dazzling strokes of Napoleon in his vain struggle to avert inevitable abdication.

Now in the blazing heat of early August, 1914, Vitry-le-François is again invaded. But not by Prussians. They are still assembling on the frontier. Meantime the school building on the main *Place* has become the skull which houses the brain of the French Armies. Desks that were made for children are occupied by heavily moustached officers of the Staff, who work through the day and night in eight-hour shifts. The atmosphere of its large hall has a portentous silence that would seem to its former inmates as strange a contrast. At one end hangs a map that far outspans those used in their own past geography lessons. On it, twice daily, are marked movements that may vitally alter their next geography lessons. To it, officers tiptoe and in whispers discuss the deductions. By it, Colonel Dupont, head of the Intelligence Section, frequently stands to give his views of what the Germans are doing and where they are going.

One step higher on the hierarchic ladder rests General Berthelot, the Assistant Chief of Staff. We speak metaphorically, for a stout ladder would be needed to support the weight of

his seventeen stone. But the weight he carries in the counsels of the *Grand-Quartier-Général* is proportionate. And his ponderous bulk is relieved by quick-darting eyes that catch the attention like helioflashes far up a mountain-side. He is to the French Army what Henry Wilson is to the British, the chief adviser, if not in name the Chief of Staff. Some might term him, likewise, its evil genius. But his capacity for misjudgment will be long obscured by his popularity and industry. Seemingly, he lives on his fat, for he survives unshaken a strain and a burden under which the Chief of Staff, General Belin, comes gradually to that collapse which overtook more swiftly the British Chief of Staff, Archibald Murray.

At the top of all rests another monument of human bulk, Joffre, the Commander-in-Chief. "Rests" is in his case a more apt term. His temperament preserves him from the strain of worry. His staff preserves him from the strain of work. During his long sojourn at Chantilly later, an amused observer will note that his office table is unencumbered by papers, his walls bare of maps—save when, on the visit of a photographer, they are hastily brought to festoon the walls and provide a background appropriate to the popular conception of a great commander. He is not, like Napoleon, constantly closeted with a *Bailler d'Albe*.

At Vitry-le-François he may often be seen by the awed onlooker outside the headquarters, walking ponderously to and fro. His clothes are as baggy as his form is bulky. Even the colour contrast of black tunic and red breeches, which, if suggestive of an out-of-date outlook, lends French uniform an artistic charm, cannot lend distinction to this wearer. White hair, pale blue eyes, toneless voice, lack of gesture—all tend to efface his impression. They seem to coincide with that very featurelessness which brought him so surprisingly to power as the proverbially "safe man." But the strong projecting chin carries the stamp of determination, if also of obstinacy. That chin gives form to his bulk, so that it acquires the impressiveness of solidity. Silence naturally strengthens it.

These will prove inestimable assets in a world where the myth of the "strong, silent man" is not yet exploded. Indisposed to believe that a man in so great a position can be as simple as he appears, that his superhuman calm can come from

insensibility, his silence from ignorance, even the Allied leaders who meet him at close quarters will feel that there must be unplumbed depths in the apparent shallows. Still greater will be his temporary value among his own people. When hope comes crashing down and nerves are frayed to tatters, he will seem a rock. And thus because, in a time of emergency, impressions are more influential than reality, Joffre's stolidity and obstinacy will repair the consequences of his gravest blunders. Those who look to him will even be able, giving the lie to their own eyes, to assume as a genius a man who was merely, but truly, a national nerve sedative.

In the first weeks of August, one of the worries that disturb Joffre's tranquillity is the importunity of Lanrezac, commanding the Fifth Army on the left wing. On July 31st, before Lanrezac even left Paris, he had sent in a memorandum which suggested that the German right wing might come, not through the Ardennes towards Sedan, but much further to the north-west. And he has been arguing ever since, much to Joffre's distaste. Lanrezac's manner is not conciliating. Heavy of build like Joffre, he is apt to be as violent and caustic as the other is stolid and restrained, while the way he cranes his head forward, and a habit of hanging his eyeglasses over his ear, accentuate his irritatingly pedagogic air. Since August 9th his anxiety about his exposed western flank has been growing, and has been expressed in his communications to Joffre, although the military habit of concurring with the views of a superior rather than incur his displeasure has checked the full disclosure of his apprehensions. But on August 9th he had objected to making an advance unless the Fourth Army simultaneously took the offensive, and on the 11th his persistency induces Joffre to allow him to side-step further west. On the 14th he goes to see Joffre, and protests that if he strikes north-east as Joffre wishes, his army may be gravely imperilled. For if the German right wing is coming west of the Meuse, it will be sweeping down on to his communications while he is entangled in the Ardennes. Although he appears to be reassured by Joffre's confidence that there is no such menace, he finds fresh information on his return which redoubles his fears. He will renew his warnings and plead for a further side-step so forcibly that Joffre, although rather scornfully declaring the "danger is far removed," will tardily allow



him to move his army into the angle formed by the Sambre and the Meuse.

Even so, the German right wing is sweeping wider still. And it is the little British Expeditionary Force, just arriving on Lanrezac's left, that the scythe will menace most.

Meantime the French right fist is striking in Lorraine. Strategically a "mutton-fist," it will soon be "cold-mutton." On the 14th, the day that Joffre rebukes Lanrezac's anxiety, he unleashes his First and Second Armies. A week earlier their offensive had been preceded by the advance of a detached army corps into Upper Alsace, a move that was partly a military distraction and partly a political attraction. It had reached Mulhouse, aiming at the Rhine bridges below Basel, but had then been forced to withdraw. Now reinforced, and impressively rechristened "The Army of Alsace," it is to renew its advance simultaneously with the main offensive.

In this Dubail's First Army was to strike towards Sarrebourg, with its right flank resting on the Vosges. Once Sarrebourg was reached it would be close to the Saverne Gap that leads to cherished Strasbourg and the Rhine. Castelnau's Second Army, on the left of the First, would advance past Château-Salins—across a country littered with lakes and woods.

Progress is hindered, but by the evening of the 18th the French are in touch with the enemy along the front of both armies. German resistance is deceptively slight, and the far-remote G.Q.G. is urging an accelerated advance. The fiery-souled Castelnau, the "*capucin botté*" as he is nicknamed, needs no spur. As full of spirit as he is short of inches, he orders a rapid and vigorous "pursuit." If his far-fetched order cannot do much to quicken the rate of march, it encourages the neglect of precautions.

What of the Germans meantime? When the French advance developed and Moltke realised that they were leaving their fortified line behind, he had a sudden inspiration, or temptation. This was to throw overboard the Schlieffen plan and, instead, seek a decision in Lorraine. The impulse was short-lived, but long enough for him to divert thither the six newly formed Ersatz divisions that should have gone to the right wing. And when he changed his mind, he failed to change their destination.

Moltke's instructions to his two left-wing Army commanders,

the Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria and General von Heeringen, were that they should not only cover his left flank but prevent the French switching troops from opposing his main wheel through Belgium. Rupprecht argued that he could only assure this by attacking. We may suspect that he was loth to forfeit the opportunity of glory by retiring when the German Crown Prince was advancing. But nothing could have been more foolishly vague than Moltke's attitude. He suggested that Rupprecht should lure the French on and catch them in a "sack," but Rupprecht refused to refrain from attacking unless given "definite orders." Moltke's deputy, Stein, then told Rupprecht's Chief of Staff on the telephone: "No, we won't oblige you by forbidding an attack. You must take the responsibility. Make your own decision as your conscience tells you." Conscience seems a curious basis for strategy! And when Rupprecht's Chief of Staff replied: "It is already made. We attack," Stein fatuously exclaimed: "Not really! Then strike and God be with you."

Thus, instead of continuing his withdrawal to the Saar, which had begun on the 14th, Rupprecht halted his army, on the 17th, ready to accept battle. And when he found the French attack slow to develop, he decided to take the offensive himself. He was impelled to this not only by the idea of forestalling the French, but by anxiety to relieve his own uncertainty. For the narrow strip that separated the rival armies was shrouded in an exceptionally dense fog of war. Rupprecht's information was poor and confusing; his cavalry was of little help, and his air reconnaissance was handicapped by the tendency of his infantry to shoot down their own aircraft. Nor did the Supreme Command give him much enlightenment beyond the "news" that Joffre had been superseded by Pau, that two-thirds of the French troops were drunk, and that "no British had yet landed on the Continent"—when, in fact, they had begun embarkation eight days earlier, and had begun entraining from the Channel ports to the front three days earlier.

For the left-wing offensive, Heeringen's *Seventh Army* was put under the control of Rupprecht as well as his own *Sixth Army*. Rupprecht's plan was that the latter should pin down the French while Heeringen's Army, emerging suddenly from the Saverne Gap and the passes of the Vosges, enveloped their

flank. But he was in too much haste, and by failing to give Heeringen's troops time to move into position he helped to thwart the possibility of a success that might have been catastrophic for the French.

They were stumbling blindly into his embrace, their cavalry as useless as the Germans' to provide warning. None of the higher commanders seem to have had a glimpse of the real situation. On the 20th, soon after daybreak, the rival armies would clash on a sixty-mile front, as each was advancing. For the French the shock would be worse because the German assault fell on them as they were staggering from the shock of meeting the defences which the Germans had prepared along the Nied.

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Foch with his XX Corps was on the extreme left of the French advance. The shock of the German onslaught was the climax to a period of strain, under which some commanders of equal age but weaker nerve were already wilting. Foch, however, showed no sign of strain, although it had fallen on him earliest of all. For he had been the sentry over the arms of France. The initial rôle of his army corps had been to watch the enemy while the main French forces were assembling in rear, and to guard this assembly.

Travelling all night from Brittany, he had reached Nancy on the morning of July 27th. Two crowded days of activity and tension followed. Then, on the 29th, he began the construction of trenches to cover Nancy—in continuation of his earlier measure. Next evening his covering troops began to move out into the position chosen to guard against a German surprise attack. When, on the 31st, orders came from Paris to "send forward" the covering troops, his two divisions were already in position! Imbued with his own precepts on "security," he had no intention of being caught napping through hesitation or delay.

With equal zeal he disregarded the orders of the Government to observe the ten-kilometre limit. He told his divisional commanders to push their advanced troops beyond it and occupy "Mont d'Amance, Mont St. Jean, and the heights of La Rochette, the real keys to Nancy." Next day, August 1st, he received from the Ministry of War a telegraphic repetition of the

orders, but obtained sanction from his immediate military superior to stay where he was. Here he truly foresaw that, if he waited, events would catch him up, instead of making him fall back. One day later they did. He had word that the Government had cancelled the ten-kilometre limit, but still insisted that their troops must avoid crossing the frontier in order that "the entire responsibility for hostilities should be left to the Germans." On receiving this message Foch promptly stretched its concession of his previous step to push reconnaissances a mile beyond his line. There were several skirmishes with German cavalry patrols, even more eager to trespass.

With the declaration of war, all check was removed, and Foch sent air reconnaissances well behind the German frontier followed on the 6th by detachments of troops. But little was discovered. The enemy seemed quiescent, and showed no signs of early attack. This relief to Foch's natural anxiety was increased by the arrival on the 8th of two more army corps of the assembling Second Army. After ten days of unremitting alertness Foch's men could now have some rest before the general advance began. Their isolated covering rôle was over; they became part of the solid offensive mass of the Second Army.

The solidity, however, was inherently deceptive, being composed, not of concrete, but of human bodies. What a target that mass would offer, what an anachronism it would be on a modern battlefield, with its dense lines of infantry clothed in red trousers and blue *capotes*, led by officers with glistening swords! The white dust of the scorching roads might serve to complete the symbolical tricolour; it could not cloak that glaringly visible mass from hostile eyes that looked along the sights of deadly fire-weapons. Nor was colour the only handicap. Bullets would be the more difficult to avoid because men were encumbered by the heavy blue tunic-coats that hung below their knees, and converted into beasts of burden by the load of equipment that towered above their shoulders. Fettered in limb, this sweating mass had for its eyes a force of cavalry that suggested a vision of the Court of King Arthur through the eyes of Mark Twain—cuirassiers in resplendent steel breastplates, dragoons in ornamental helmets with horsehair plumes that hung down their backs. Mounted, they were too easily immobilised by modern fire, or brought to a premature halt by needlessly jaded horses;

dismounted, they were scarcely more mobile than the chivalry of medieval France at Poitiers.

Courage they had in abundance, both infantry and cavalry, but courage alone could not compensate such manifold material handicaps. Yet this blind, blatant, unwieldy mass was the spearhead that had been forged to deliver the *offensive à outrance*.

In accordance with Plan XVII the Second Army was to be pushed into the angle or pocket formed by the Rivers Saar and Moselle. The further it advanced the more would its flanks be contracted, and also exposed to counter-pressure. The Moselle side of the pocket, moreover, was artificially narrowed by the outspreading fortifications of Metz. And it was along this side that Foch's corps had to advance, guarding the flank of the other corps from counterstroke at the same time as it was pushing forward in unison with them.

When the general advance began on August 14th the awkwardness of its rôle and position was soon felt. It gained the frontier ridge but suffered heavy loss from the German fire, accurately ranged by the use of pre-selected aiming-points. The second day brought a worse trial, for the troops lay still all day under a persistent fire. This enforced passivity was due to the fact that the XV Corps on their right had suffered so badly in the first day's impetuous assault that it needed a day's interval to recover.

When the advance was resumed after daybreak on the 16th, it met a mysterious emptiness. Not a shot was fired. The German positions were found to be untenanted. Local inhabitants told of a night-long retirement.

In an army trained on a more wary tradition, such facts might have engendered suspicion. Not so with the French. Castelnau seems to have jumped to the conclusion that because his men had suffered heavily from the enemy's concealed fire-positions their men, being an inferior race, must have suffered worse, and that they were already wilting before the superiority of French will-power. On the 18th he issued his orders for a rapid pursuit, saying that he expected "corps commanders to inspire in their troops that ardour different from the methodical spirit which is required against prepared positions." The fully prepared German positions, instead of being past, were a day's march ahead.

Castelnau's attitude is the more astonishing because his army

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was coincidentally reduced. Of his five army corps, two were suddenly taken away to reinforce Joffre's left-fist punch, now that the Germans were known to be coming through Luxembourg and Belgium. As one of these corps, the IX, had hitherto been covering the left flank of the army, its departure not only left to Foch this duty but left his own flank exposed.

On the 19th, however, Foch's divisions pressed forward without trouble until the afternoon, when they came under a fire that steadily grew. He thus fell short of his objectives, but even so had advanced some ten miles. The XV and XVI Corps on his right met more resistance and made less progress. In consequence he was at nightfall standing in echelon ahead of them, instead of behind them, as intended.

That evening Castelnau, still believing that he had only a German rearguard in front of him, issued orders for the attack to be renewed by his XV and XVI Corps next morning. But Foch's corps, because of its advanced position, was to wait, meantime securing its hold on the ground where it stood.

Foch, however, gave orders during the night for his corps to renew the attack at 6 a.m. Three-quarters of an hour before his attack on Morhange was due to begin he sent a message to Castelnau telling him of the fact. Before it arrived Castelnau had already seen Foch's night orders and had sent a staff officer to tell him not to attack, and that it was most important to entrench strongly as a safeguard against an enemy counterstroke from Metz. And when Foch's 5.15 a.m. message reached Castelnau he sent a stringent order by telephone, forbidding Foch to launch an attack and enjoining strict obedience to his own original orders.

After the war a sharp controversy arose, in which it was asserted that, by rash disobedience, Foch had exposed his left flank to a disastrous counterstroke and so compelled Castelnau to order a general retreat. The historic facts bear out the allegation only in part.

Foch would seem to have had the will to disobey—but the Germans anticipated him. They struck him before his attack could begin. All night long the movement of trains had been heard behind their front. At a quarter past five they attacked Foch's left convergently in front and flank. It was driven back, losing many men and part of its artillery. Fortunately the

Germans, though much superior in strength, were tardy in following up their advantage and so allowed Foch's left to re-establish its line.

There are also considerations which affect the question of his will to disobey. His order to attack Morhange was undoubtedly prompted by a desire to help his neighbour, and so showed his interpretation of "intellectual discipline." Moreover, according to his memoirs, neither orders nor information reached him from Army Headquarters on the evening of the 19th, and he did not hear of Castelnau's instructions until morning. The official history is silent on this point.

Whether he took adequate precautions to guard his left is another question. It is significant that Joffre, in telephoning a report of the defeat to the President on August 22nd, said that "the XX Corps . . . advanced perhaps a little too quickly, and before the troops detailed to cover the left flank could get up." Foch's left flank was, obviously, both the most exposed and the most vital spot of the Second Army line. In the ten-mile gap between it and its starting-point on the River Seille stood only one Reserve division. The Crown Prince Rupprecht was not slow to appreciate where the point of opportunity lay. Against Foch's corner of the line were thrown two army corps, the most heavily weighted odds in the German attack. Foch had ordered a regiment of cavalry, supported by one of infantry, to guard his exposed left flank and to reconnoitre outwards. As his orders were not issued until the early hours of the 20th, the precaution was too late, if also perhaps too slight. And it was so close to nightfall when his previous day's advance had halted that his troops do not appear to have done much to organise their positions for resistance. The German surprise attack at dawn gave them no time to repair this defect, and the Germans began to work round their left rear, producing a critical situation.

Yet the real source of the French retreat was not in Foch's sector. Although less heavily attacked, the left of the XVI Corps had given way as early as seven o'clock, and the whole XV Corps soon fell back even more markedly. Worse still, its troops were reported as being almost at the end of their endurance.

Thus at 10.10 a.m. Castelnau, who had used up his reserves,

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ordered a general retreat. It is significant that in reporting the fact to Joffre he ascribed the necessity to the attacks on his right. This disproves the charge that Foch's reverse was the cause of the general collapse—for it is the impression received by the supreme commander, rather than the actual situation of the troops, that determines the issue in war.

Castelnau's order for retreat, indeed, came as a distasteful surprise to Foch. His left had rallied, his right was unshaken, and his assailants had outrun the support of their artillery. "If ever I were tempted to disobey, it is to-day," he told his Chief of Staff, Colonel Duchesne. But the latter reminded him: "You don't know what is happening to the other corps." So, just before noon, Foch directed his divisions to withdraw to the high ground near Château-Salins. He lifted a corner of the veil when he remarked: "But the roads were blocked by troops in disorder, by supply columns, and by magnificent motor cars from Nice." Soon a fresh order came from Castelnau, telling him to cover the retreat of the rest of the Army "by holding the Château-Salins bridgehead as long as possible." For the disorder behind Foch's front was good order compared with the state of the other corps. Exhausted and leaderless men poured back in swelling streams, their dejection the worse because they had been so abruptly disillusioned as to the potency of the *offensive à outrance*. The saving factor was that the German pursuit soon slackened.

Foch had made his dispositions to hold the bridgehead, and felt confident of doing so, when he received a message from Castelnau that "the XV Corps, which has suffered very heavily, will not be able to maintain its positions on your right. I consider it advisable, therefore, that you profit by the darkness and fall back to-night." So the retreat continued all night long, and by daybreak the troops were back across their own frontier.

Even there they did not make a stand, although not a German was in sight of them. If Foch's 39th Division had lost most of its guns, his 11th Division was in good fettle. But the other corps were in a parlous state, the XV little better than a mob, and Castelnau decided to retire behind the River Meurthe, leaving only an outpost line on the eastern bank. On the left, his Couronné de Nancy was still held by the Reserve divisions posted there, but the abandonment of this rampart was even



contemplated, as Foch found when he visited Army Headquarters in the evening. "I went to Nancy. They wanted to evacuate it. I said: 'The enemy is two days' march distant from Nancy, and the XX Corps is there. They won't walk over the XX without protest!'"

But it looked as if they would walk past it. Next morning the XV Corps reported that its troops were too exhausted to resist any attack. As a temporary relief a brigade from Foch's corps was sent to replace the outposts of the XV Corps, whose retirement across the river it covered. Castelnau's line had now an alarming sag in the centre. Out of this misfortune good fortune came. For into the re-entrant, thus unintentionally formed, the now arriving Germans were throwing their main weight, pushing towards Lunéville and that very Gap of Charmes which a defensively minded generation of French strategists had earlier prepared for their ensnarement.

Discovering, on the 24th, the Germans' direction, Castelnau decided to profit by the opportunity to strike back at their flanks. Foch was to carry out the left-hand blow.

He struck early on the 25th, and his men at first made progress; but the enemy made a quick recovery, pressing them back in the afternoon. Nevertheless, Foch's attack had acted as a brake on the German progress along the main line, forcing them to concentrate against his threat to their rear.

The right-hand blow had obtained more visible success. It even led Castelnau in a fresh burst of confidence to call for a pursuit pushed "to the extreme limit of endurance," and "a final blow which will ensure victory." Foch attempted to fulfil this demand next morning, but his men could only make slight progress. As the other corps had also shot their bolt, Castelnau was constrained to call a halt. But if the effort had not realised his offensive ambitions, it had achieved a real defensive object—by paralysing the German advance. This, in the outcome, would not be renewed until over a week later and then, launched frontally against the Couronné de Nancy, would prove a complete disappointment to the Kaiser, waiting with his white cuirassiers to make a triumphal entry into the ancient capital of Lorraine. Foch had helped to prevent a re-echo of the fanfares of Manteuffel.

But he himself was not present to see the foiling of the German

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aim. For on the night of the 27th he received a summons to a higher rôle. He was at his advanced headquarters at an inn quaintly but aptly called "Les Œufs Durs," when a message was delivered, telling him to report at G.Q.G. to take over a new command. What it would be he did not know. But he was told to take with him two officers as a nucleus for his staff. One of them, Lieut.-Colonel Max Weygand, was then second in command of the 5th Hussars, and actually serving in Foch's corps. He had attended a course at the Centre of Higher Military Studies in 1913, and his selection for this course was a forecast of his future. For he had not been through the Ecole de Guerre; it was the exception, and a mark of exceptional promise, for anyone who was not a Staff College graduate to be admitted to the "School for budding marshals."

As an instructor at Saumur, however, the lucid reasoning and striking common sense which underlay his lectures had spread his reputation, and many of his contemporaries had come to regard him as the ablest of their generation. His appointment to be Foch's staff officer was of fateful result for both. Weygand had only met his new chief three times before the war, and then on formal terms. For the first few weeks of their association its endurance was uncertain; Foch was not a man who gave his trust easily, and his ways were disconcerting to a staff officer. But the two soon blended and ultimately became inseparable, mounting the ladder of power together until they became one of the most famous combinations in history.

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The relation of Weygand to Foch has been compared to that of Berthier to Napoleon, and of Ludendorff to Hindenburg. Neither comparison is true. Weygand proved as perfect a staff "clerk" as Berthier; but he was much more—to an amazing memory and a capacity for detail he added strength of character and initiative. Unlike Ludendorff, he did not obscure or superimpose himself on his chief. To the world he sank himself in his chief, and to those who tried to probe beneath the surface replied that all the credit belonged to Foch. His habit of self-effacement was helped by physique. For if Foch was small but sturdy, Weygand was small and slight. Foch was ebullient in speech and gesture, Weygand restrained. And while Foch's head and

face, disproportionately large for his body, counterbalanced his lack of inches and made him impressive at first glance, Weygand's small features and dapper air veiled his force of character until closely observed. Then, the impression was the stronger by contrast. Weygand was the natural complement of Foch, supplying the qualities that his Chief lacked. Weygand had the power to translate Foch's cryptic, often fragmentary, phrases into definite and practical instructions. He had a knack of organisation where Foch was a natural disorganiser. It is a tribute to both that they coalesced into a unity. "Weygand c'est moi." If the phrase is legendary, it is certainly true, and more truly significant, that when confronted with a question he sometimes replied: "Demandez à Weygand, c'est la même chose."

But there was irony in the fact that one who was not a trained staff officer should serve as a staff officer throughout the war. That he fitted his rôle so perfectly, not only in work but in self-effacement, was a jest of fate at the expense of a man who, imbued with the cavalry spirit, longed to command troops.

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Foch and Weygand left by car for G.Q.G. about noon on August 28th. "We crossed Nancy during a squall. Weygand took the opportunity to say good-bye to his wife, who had not yet quitted her home in Lunéville." They next called at Castelnau's headquarters, where they picked up the other new staff officer, Lieut.-Colonel Devaux. More delays came in passing through the entrenched camp of Toul because they had not been given the special countersign. They did not reach Vitry-le-François until dusk. And gloom they found there.

They had left Lorraine with a cheerful feeling as to the situation there and in blissful ignorance as to the situation elsewhere. They were disillusioned abruptly—by the news that all the north of France as far as the Somme was submerged by the German tide of invasion.

From the German attack on Liège Joffre had drawn, not the natural deduction, but the one that suited his plan and his wishes. Although the Germans were obviously taking a path through Belgium, he concluded that the Meuse would be the limit of their detour, and that even so they would have to thin their centre in order to stretch as widely. This assumption fitted the alternative

provided for in Plan XVII. Grasping once more at phantoms, Joffre and his staff embraced this idea so fervently that in imagination they saw their left-fist punch delivering a knock-out blow. Their Third and Fourth Armies would strike north-east through the Ardennes against the flank of the Germans advancing through Belgium and thus dislocate the German enveloping manœuvre. The French Fifth Army, together with the British, would converge against the enemy's other flank. Here was a pretty picture—of the French pincers closing on the unconscious Germans !

The Germans, however, had a similar idea, with rôles reversed and greater strength to realise it. Moreover, they had the additional advantage of moving more widely, without weakness, than the French imagined. Thus the French armies, pushing blindly into the Ardennes, a central sector supposedly denuded of enemy troops, blundered against the German *Fourth and Fifth Armies* on August 22nd and were heavily thrown back.

The troops attacked blindly with the bayonet and were mown down by machine-guns. Fortunately the Germans, also, were so uncertain of the situation that they were slow to follow up their opportunity.

But to the north-west the French Fifth Army and the British had, under Joffre's orders, put their heads almost into the enemy's noose. Lanrezac alone suspected the hidden menace and his precautions helped to avert it. The Allied left wing fell back in time, if only just in time, to escape from the trap.

The repulse of his centre and left wing at last awakened Joffre to the true situation. From the wreckage of his plan he now tried to reconstruct a new plan. He decided to swing back his centre and left, while drawing troops from his right to form a new Sixth Army for a counterstroke on the extreme left. The Germans, by driving his right wing back to the shelter of the French fortress barrier in Lorraine, had helped to make this transfer of force possible.

But on the eve of Foch's arrival at G.Q.G. this new plan had been postponed, if not annulled, by the speed of the German onrush. The German right wing arrived in the Somme area while the Sixth Army was in process of assembling there, and so compelled it to share in the general retreat, now accelerated. Fastest of all to the rear marched the British, for their com-

mander, Sir John, French, was so disillusioned with the French plan, so disgusted at the way he seemed to have been first ensnared and then forsaken, that he was now obsessed with the idea of regaining his base. He even refused to help his neighbour's counter-attack in applying a brake to the German momentum.

When Foch reached Vitry-le-François Joffre had just returned from the headquarters of the Fifth Army, where, after a violent scene, he had compelled Lanrezac to issue orders for this counter-attack, at Guise. Foch heard much about the general situation, but not about his own task. It was, however, a good augury that he was assigned the room which the previous night had been tenanted by the new Minister of War, Millerand.

On the 29th Joffre left early to superintend the riposte at Guise, but before his departure he saw Foch and told him to take command of an "Army Detachment" formed by subtraction from the left wing of General de Langle de Cary's Fourth Army. Foch was to act under Langle de Cary's orders.

The reason for this splitting up lay in the rapidly changing situation. The Fourth Army, originally made the largest for its offensive rôle, had become too unwieldy for handling under the strain of retreat. Moreover, a wide gap had arisen between it and the Fifth Army. Foch's task was to relieve Langle de Cary of part of his burden and, above all, to reknit the line of division between the Fourth and Fifth Armies.

Before taking up his task he had to settle whether Weygand or Devaux should be his Chief of Staff. The former was senior, but the latter was a Staff College graduate. Although G.Q.G. had intended Weygand for the appointment, the choice was submitted to Foch, who replied with characteristic crispness: "I will take the senior. If he is no good to me, back he goes to his regiment in a few days' time." For although he was willing to try Weygand, so highly regarded by G.Q.G., it is clear that he had serious doubts whether an officer lacking the *brevet* of the Ecole de Guerre could prove adequate, and that he would not have chosen Weygand if a wider field of selection had been offered. But, besides the original two, Foch had picked up only a few juniors—among them the officer-interpreter André Tardieu, future Prime Minister of France. As Foch himself said later: "We were like a poor household. There was a staff of

five or six officers, hastily got together, little or no working material, only our notebooks and a few maps."

With these exiguous means of control Foch had to take charge of a force that comprised the IX and XI Army Corps (each of two divisions), the 9th Cavalry Division, and two Reserve divisions—all taken from the Fourth Army. In addition, the 42nd Division, just detraining on arrival from the Verdun area, would come under his command. The XI Corps had suffered badly in the opening shock, the IX Corps was an improvised formation, the two Reserve divisions had already shown ominous "signs of disorder and indiscipline," while the 42nd Division, although of fine quality, was handicapped by its severance from a corps organisation.

Foch's first step was to visit Langle de Cary, whose harassed state of mind was shown in his greeting: "Providence has sent you." To which Foch replied: "All right! All right! We shall see." He found that Langle de Cary could give him little information as to the units of his new command, having practically lost touch with them in the flux of the retreat. Foch soon discovered that the IX Corps on his extreme left had been forced back so far that the bridges over the Aisne at Rethel were uncovered and his flank endangered. He promptly, and characteristically, issued an order for attack—to retake the heights north of the river. His intention was not fulfilled, for the next thing he learnt was that his troops had fallen back still further, and he was compelled to approve a complete withdrawal south of the river.

Next day his "Army Detachment" was well in rear of the rest of the Fourth Army, and the gap between it and the Fifth Army had grown to be some twenty-five miles.

Langle de Cary was proposing, however, to strike back at the enemy, and on the 31st Foch had a telephone enquiry from Joffre whether he could hold on and cover Langle de Cary's flank. Foch, in reply, held out little hope, on account of his loss of guns and the fatigue of the troops. He suggested that "the only way the detachment could hold out would be by manœuvring in retreat, and this over a depth which would, without doubt, endanger the Fourth Army."

Partly in consequence, Joffre ordered the Fourth Army to give up its project and fall back. Thus it was able to catch up Foch's detachment, which had now slipped back out of reach

of the enemy and, freed from the pressure of pursuit, was able to regain both cohesion and contact with the Fifth Army. In some measure, too, the troops recovered from their exhaustion and depression, although hampered by the heavy loss of officers. The two Reserve divisions had been so badly shaken that Foch seized the first chance to pull them out of the line.

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The other, and greater, cause of Joffre's decision had been the renewed recoil of his left wing, after the momentary success of the riposte at Guise. Hence on September 1st he issued new instructions which foreshadowed a far-reaching continuance of the retreat. He defined as its limit a line south of the Rivers Seine, Aube, and Ornain—i.e. away from the southward of Paris. It is true that the instructions said that this limit might not "necessarily be reached," but such pseudo-optimistic qualifications are common in official orders as a means of breaking bad news gently. Joffre's real outlook was shown next day by the note to the army commanders in which he indicated a line drawn still further back on both flanks, so forming a defensive arc, where the armies would "recruit their strength with drafts from the dépôts." The note also spoke of his intention to "organise and fortify" this line. It is clear that he hoped to return to the offensive eventually, rather than early. A commander who is contemplating an early counter-offensive does not place a river obstacle between himself and his target. And when Sir John French, on the 2nd, suggested a stand on the Marne, Joffre replied: "I do not believe it possible to envisage a general action on the Marne," and suggested instead that the British should co-operate "in the defence of Paris." The Sixth Army had already retired within the Paris defences.

It is likely that if the retreat had been continued thus far the French armies would have dissolved. For, unwisely, they had been trained for the *offensive à outrance*, not for a retreating manoeuvre. Already control had lapsed. Higher commanders might issue orders, but, even where these reached the fighting units, they had little effect. To a large extent the retreat was being directed by divisional or brigade commanders, each in his own small zone. In any case, the prospects of a counter-offensive were seriously diminished by the fact that Joffre's new halting-

line involved the abandonment of his pivot—Verdun. Happily Sarrail, who had just been appointed to replace Ruffey in command of the pivotal Third Army, was reluctant to obey the instructions. His hesitation helped to save the situation. The other and primary instruments of salvation were the German command and the Governor of Paris.

According to the original plan, Kluck's *First Army*, the flank army, was to sweep round the west side of Paris in its wheel. Instead, it wheeled inwards, before reaching Paris, to cut off Lanrezac. Moltke approved this change of direction less from hope than from fear. Like most timid strategists, he became anxious when his armies stretched out widely, instead of being shoulder to shoulder. He could not appreciate that wideness of extension was a net that baffled and entangled the opponent, paralysing his counter-measures—as it had done twice already, on the frontier and on the Somme. Instead, by seeking to contract both his line and his risk Moltke not only contracted his prospects but exposed himself to a fatal counterstroke. For the flank of the wheeling German line was now to skirt the near side of Paris and pass across the face of the Paris defences.

But the change in Moltke's plan did not end with this step. He seems to have had a belated sense of its danger, and a suspicion that the French were switching troops from their right to their left near Paris. On September 4th he definitely abandoned Schlieffen's plan of general envelopment for a narrower aim. The German centre and left were to close like pincers round Verdun, while the right wing was to turn outwards and face Paris as a shield for these pincers. But Kluck had already crossed the Marne and was echeloned in front instead of behind the other right wing army, Bülow's, so that to fulfil Moltke's order he had to perform a sort of backward somersault. A large army is not suited to such gymnastic movements. And these did not suit the temperament of Kluck, who saw that his would-be decisive rôle would be converted into a mere protective rôle. So on the 5th he continued his march towards the Seine, saying that "the movement to face west might be made at leisure," and leaving only a weak detachment to guard his outer flank. Next morning it was struck by the French Sixth Army, moving out from Paris.

That stroke was due to the ardent initiative of Galliéni. Joffre had known of Kluck's inward wheel when he gave his



own order for a continued retreat. The knowledge made no impression on his plan. But on Galliéni, who only discovered Kluck's movement late on the 3rd, it caused an instant reaction. Early next morning he ordered the Sixth Army to be ready to strike, and spent the day in eager efforts to persuade the British to co-operate and Joffre to sanction the counterstroke. Late that evening his arguments and efforts were crowned with success. Joffre issued an order for the whole left wing to turn about and take the offensive on the 6th. He followed it by a stirring proclamation to the troops, a proclamation of which the original was later found to bear three dates, two already erased !

When the counterstroke was delivered, conditions were ripe for its success. The German right wing had advanced so rapidly that its supplies had failed to keep pace, so that the fatigue of the hard-driven troops, marching daily twenty miles or more under a blazing sun, was increased by hunger. But even their bodily exhaustion was not so bad as the mental exhaustion of the high commanders, fearful of their own apparent success and ever apprehensive of a British landing on the Belgian coast in their rear. Furthermore, the Supreme Command, staying back at Luxembourg, had lost touch with the army commanders, and had the less power to control them because they were each intent on the fulfilment of their personal ambitions. Thus a jar might suffice to cause the breakdown of the German war-machine. And, in the event, this was the result of no more than a jar. In proportion to its scale and its historical effect no decisive battle has seen less fighting than that of the Marne.

Only on the far western flank was the Allied counter-offensive marked by vigorous action, and here Galliéni's impulsion was handicapped by the poor quality of most of his troops. Yet here, certainly, was the source of the decision. When Galliéni's pressure developed against the Germans' sensitive flank, Kluck was induced to draw off first one part and then the remainder of his army to support his menaced flank guard. Thereby a thirty-mile gap was created between his army and Bülow's. He was emboldened to take the risk because the British had disappeared from his front, carried out of sight by the rapidity of their retreat. This unintentional "vanishing trick" completed the source of the victory. For when they retraced their steps the news that they were approaching the gap proved—by its moral

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effect on the right wing commanders—the signal for the German retreat, which began on September 9th.

Without derogating from Galliéni's inspired initiative, the German defeat can be traced to the habit of mind formed in peace-time manœuvres. The German commanders were too well trained in conforming to the umpire's decision. On September 9th they had reached a situation where, on manœuvres, the umpire would have ordered a withdrawal. In the absence of an umpire on the actual battlefield, their academic military conscience served as a substitute. They obeyed the inner umpire—and went back. Bülow's army having begun the retreat, the others had no hesitation in conforming. They continued to go back, even though their opponents were slow to come on. What a jest of Fate!

Nor was it the only one. Equally ironical was the distribution of the laurels for the "Victory of the Marne." Galliéni had to wait for his share, the most justified share, until he was dead, when he was deservedly if belatedly promoted Marshal of France. In the meantime Joffre had been decorated by the staff of G.Q.G. with most of the laurel leaves. They were slow to wither, and all the slower perhaps because G.Q.G. had custody of the paper leaves in the files of correspondence. That at least is the accusation levied by numerous post-war critics in France. And it is certain that some of those leaves have never been found. Of the laurel leaves that G.Q.G. could spare, the greater part were bestowed on Foch. Joffre had a just appreciation of his spirit and his loyalty. Furthermore, he had no reason to be jealous of him, whereas Galliéni was Joffre's designated successor in case of need.

Among all the legends of the Marne that which grew up around Foch's part was the most comprehensive and had the least substance. The first report, which long survived the war, was that Foch decided the issue of the whole battle by a dramatic counterstroke which threw the Prussian Guard "into the marshes of St. Gond." But, in fact, the Germans took leave of him without interference—after the issue had been decided elsewhere.

The second, and more modest, claim is that Foch made the victory possible by preventing a German break-through in the French centre. Even this is not entirely accurate—because the German command was not aiming to break through in the sector

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where Foch stood. Bülow was merely trying to carry out his new protective task of wheeling to face west ; in the course of this wheel, his left wing inevitably bumped against Foch's front. And although Foch had also to bear the assault of part of Hausen's *Third Army*, this army had merely been given the rôle of linking the offensive centre with the new defensive right of the German armies. Hausen's army being composed of Saxons, the Prussians tended to discount its value. Hence, perhaps, its indefinite rôle.

Let us now trace the actual part that Foch played in the Battle of the Marne.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE "MIRACLE" OF THE MARNE

JOFFRE's order for the counter-offensive, although timed 10 p.m. on September 4th, did not reach Foch's headquarters at Fère-Champenoise until six hours later. It indicated that his detachment now constituted a separate army, the Ninth. But the rôle assigned to his army in the order was protective rather than offensive—to "cover the right of the Fifth Army by holding the southern exits of the Marshes of St. Gond, and by sending part of its forces to the plateau north of Sézanne."

The late arrival of the order imperilled its fulfilment, for Foch's army was now about to begin another day's march which would have taken it away from the shelter of the natural obstacle formed by the marshes. But Foch at once sent out liaison officers to stop the movement, and with an order that told the 42nd Division, on the left of the army, to hold the exits of the marshes.

Then he considered his problem, and at 9.30 a.m. issued his instructions. Characteristically, they gave Joffre's order an offensive interpretation. The main weight of the army was to be shifted westwards behind the marshes. But it was not to stay there. The IX Corps and the 42nd Division were to push strong

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advanced guards over the marshes and be ready to join in the Fifth Army's offensive. The XI Corps was left to hold the sector east of the marshes, which was open and easy of access save for the slight obstacle offered by the little river Somme, a tributary of the Marne. The army thus covered a front of over twenty miles, of which the marshes occupied half. And beyond its right flank was a twenty-mile gap between it and the left of the Fourth Army at Vitry-le-François. Foch placed his cavalry division to fill this gap as well as it could.

His plan was inspired by the idea of actively helping his left-hand neighbour, the Fifth Army. But, in the event, it was to imperil himself. For the Germans shifted their weight east of the marshes, where his natural and numerical strength was least. And as he had attached his two Reserve divisions to his two active Corps, he left himself for the moment with no reserve directly under his own hand. Helpful as was the intention of his plan, its wisdom is questionable. The marshes could only be crossed by four causeways, so they were virtually impassable to any attack in face of opposition. Hence in disposing the bulk of the IX Corps behind them, he placed here more strength than was needed for defence. And his own attempt at offence was soon baulked.

### SEPTEMBER 6TH

In the early hours of the 6th the IX Corps endeavoured to carry out its preliminary offensive task. But after crossing the marshes its troops ran into the advancing enemy and were soon driven back to the south side. Foch recognised the inevitable with an order at midday that the IX Corps "should take up a firm defensive attitude and position."

Along the western half of the marshes the assailants had been troops of the German *X Corps*, which, as the left centre of Bülow's army, was then executing its protective wheel. Following on the heels of the French, some of them gained a footing across the marshes, but were then stopped by artillery fire. Another division of the German *X Corps* advanced just west of the marshes and there attacked Foch's left near Mondement. After a day of to-and-fro struggle, his 42nd Division had only ceded a little ground.

Along the eastern half of the marshes the assailants belonged





to the German *Guard Corps*, the left wing of Bülow's army. One division of this corps was directed towards the marshes and the other east of them. Seeing how formidable the obstacle was, the corps commander, Plettenberg, soon stopped the attempt to force it. Meantime his other division had forced the line of the Somme without much difficulty. But, as the tired French infantry were falling back, their artillery came to the rescue and discouraged the enemy from further advance. The Prussians made an attempt to extend further east and find a way round their opponents' flank. But they did not succeed in finding the flank. Plettenberg then sent a call for help to the neighbouring Saxon army, and decided to wait until its troops had come up. Late in the afternoon one division arrived, but was stopped by artillery fire before reaching the Somme. Thus the day was wasted, whereas if Plettenberg had avoided the marshes and directed his whole corps east of it originally, he might have placed Foch in an awkward plight.

That night, however, Plettenberg decided to side-step both his divisions eastwards, leaving only a handful of troops to guard the causeways. He ordered an attack to be launched soon after daybreak.

Foch had a similar intention. For his dominant idea was to fulfil his defensive mission by attacking. If this attitude coincided with his natural instincts, it was also, in his judgment, the best way to prevent the enemy probing the gap between himself and his neighbour. Perhaps he recalled the example of Kettler at Dijon in 1870. In any case his orders on the morning of the 7th were that the 42nd Division on his left was to attack in conjunction with the flank corps of the Fifth Army. In the centre the IX Corps was to make sure of holding the marshes and to be ready to attack. On his right the XI Corps was definitely to attack. The 18th Division, just arriving as a fresh reinforcement, was kept in army reserve and posted in rear of the XI Corps.

#### SEPTEMBER 7TH

Once more the day was to see a contrast between intention and event. There is also a contrast between the account of it given in Foch's memoirs and that obtained from the German records; the former tells of an Homeric conflict, while the latter confesses

that owing to bungled arrangements and the French artillery fire its intended attacks did not properly develop. But from a comparative analysis of the German and French records a definite outline emerges. It is clear that Bülow planned a "simultaneous concentric attack . . . in the general direction of Sézanne," against the bastion formed by Foch's position. Bülow sought this local success as a balm for feelings wounded by the necessity of wheeling back his right wing in accordance with the order to take up protective dispositions.

But his *X Corps* made no more than a partial attack, working round the western edge of the marshes and gaining some more ground towards Mondement. It at least forestalled the intended attack of Foch's 42nd Division. Along the marshes both sides were content to face and fire their guns at each other, although the German records mention a small and abortive attack here by two French battalions. East of the marshes the intended attack of the Prussian Guard was largely a fiasco. Shortly before it was to be launched, the French guns opened fire and the French infantry made a strong reconnaissance. Plettenberg mistook this for a general attack and countermanded his own attack, intending to postpone it until a second division of Saxons had come up. But his order was too late to stop some of the battalions, which, attacking unsupported, suffered heavily. This set-back had a moral effect on the renewal of the attack early in the afternoon. The troops delivered it half-heartedly and abandoned it after a sharp pommelling by the French artillery, although their advance induced the French to fall back from the defensive line of the river.

It is interesting to compare the impressions of the opposing sides as to this sector. On the German side we read the admission—"The French artillery had an unexpected effect, and remained uncontested victor. The intended attack was everywhere nipped in the bud. . . . The 7th of September was the worst day in the war so far for the troops." Yet Foch's view was that, after the first German attack—"The situation was already critical and might quickly become worse, for it was evident that the troops were on the verge of giving way."

To stimulate them he applied a dual remedy. Firstly, he informed them that "On the left wing the Army the enemy appears to be giving way." He also said that the German



opposition to his right wing "had no other object than to delay the approaching moment when the line opposite to us will in its turn retreat. The situation is therefore excellent." This intimation was encouraging, if not true to the facts—for the Germans were as deliberately wheeling back on his left as they were definitely intending to wheel forward on his right. In the second place, he repeated his order for the XI Corps to attack, and lent a brigade from his reserve to help it. But the troops do not seem to have cared for the taste of this remedy, and did not attack. Foch was much annoyed at their non-compliance with his order, but in the light of the morrow it was perhaps all to the good. He had not the strength to gain success, and a successful attack would have still further impoverished troops whose endurance was already at a low ebb. The next day was to be critical; it might easily have proved fatal.

On the night of the 7th Foch merely repeated his previous orders, but added, in expectation of the enemy's retreat, that "at dawn reconnaissances are to be pushed out along the whole front to ascertain definitely what points are still occupied by the enemy." His expectation was to be falsified before daybreak, and it would seem that the optimistic suggestion contained in the clause contributed to the surprise which his troops suffered.

The same night a momentous discussion was taking place behind the German lines. Fear of the French artillery was so strong that, as the only way of evading its power, General von Hausen proposed to make "an assault in the grey of the morning" with the bayonet. Plettenberg was aghast at the suggestion, but eventually agreed. The plan was certainly unconventional and hazardous, for the troops were leaden with lack of sleep, and they had no time for preparation nor any clear idea where the French positions lay. Yet in the issue the risk was justified and originality repaid.

#### SEPTEMBER 8TH

At 4.30 a.m., without a gun firing, the German infantry filed across the Somme, deployed, and moved stumbingly forward. The French were taken utterly by surprise, and soon all three divisions of the XI Corps were rushing pell-mell backwards, sweeping Foch's reserve division, the 18th, along with them in their disordered retreat. It was not stopped, and all efforts to

rally the troops failed, until they were some six miles back. They were then well south of Fère-Champenoise—so far, indeed, that Foch's advanced headquarters at Pleurs was almost in the front line.

Happily for Foch, the Germans were slow to catch up so rapid a retreat. Most of them halted on reaching the vacated French position—the extra distance travelled by the French infantry is a vivid illustration of the multiplicative effect of surprise! The consequence of the Germans' early halt was that they failed to capture all but a fraction of the French guns. Thus these survived to torment them again, and to discourage them from further advance; all the more because their own artillery was slow to come up.

Five hours later, just after midday, Plettenberg ordered a further advance. But his divisional commanders made no attempt to comply with his orders, although some of their units pushed forward independently and occupied the deserted village of Fère-Champenoise. The Saxon divisions made no greater attempt to exploit the success; one was content to reorganise along the railway embankment just beyond the Somme, and the other only pushed on far enough to send an exculpatory report that it could see no sign of the French. The "victorious" Germans, in fact, had merely staggered forward like blind-drunk men, and were unable to give the Higher Command any light on the situation beyond reports of their own "extreme exhaustion."

What of Foch meantime? When the news of the collapse reached him he ordered the XI Corps to reoccupy Fère-Champenoise, and told the commander, Eydoux, that the 18th Division was placed under him for the purpose. But such orders were utterly vain in the actual circumstances. His other step was to telephone an appeal for help to the neighbouring armies. He applied first to the Fourth Army on his right, but Langle de Cary replied that he was too fully engaged, and that the interval between the armies was too wide for him to render aid. He, indeed, was faced with the real German attempt at a breakthrough.

Foch then telephoned to his left-hand neighbour, the Fifth Army, asking its commander to renew his attack alongside the left wing of the Ninth Army. It should be noted that Foch at this time only asked for indirect assistance. And it should be

mentioned that, on the previous day, Bülow's right wing had made the first stage of its wheel back so tranquilly that at dusk "not an enemy was to be seen"—a fact which suggests that the French Fifth Army's unopposed advance had been leisurely.

Franchet d'Esperey, who had just been given command of the Fifth Army in the place of Lanrezac, answered Foch's appeal with an assurance that he would pursue his advance. He also ordered the X Corps on his right to incline north-eastward, which would tend to ease the pressure on Foch. But the only appreciable progress that day was made by his left.

Although Foch's memoirs speak of a successful attack in the morning by his 42nd Division alongside his neighbour's X Corps, the Germans opposite them say that they did not see any French infantry. The explanation would seem to be that the French advance was made across the empty space between the two sides. And across part of it only. For in the afternoon the Germans made a small advance near the western edge of the marshes, which carried their line south of the Petit Morin, and they confess that they had had no real fighting to justify their halt.

The IX Corps in Foch's centre had less luck than his left. Bülow had brought a division from his extreme western flank by a forced march to assist the *Guard Corps*. Its leading brigade crossed the marshes by a single causeway, meeting only a few snipers. The brigade was then shelled, however, not only by the French, but by its own heavy artillery. After a time it got under way again, and the French Moroccan division facing it fell back some distance.

The French defence of the marshes was hampered by the crisis on the right flank. For early in the morning Foch had sent the commander of the IX Corps, Dubois, "repeated warnings to the following effect: 'The vital point for your Corps to-day is its right, where you must give the XI Corps your full support. You will therefore move all your available troops in this direction, including those in the centre which are not at present engaged.' " Dubois had protested that there were signs of an imminent attack on his own front, but Foch had swept aside his excuses with the assurance that the guns he heard were merely those of the 42nd Division which "continues to advance with ease." His protest thus overriden, the commander of the IX

Corps moved two of his three divisions, the 17th and 52nd, to take up an oblique line on his flank west and south-west of Fère-Champenoise.

Foch devoted his main efforts during the day to urging and organising a counter-attack to regain this place. But when finally delivered, in the afternoon, it came to no more than a demonstration by two regiments of the 52nd Division. Nevertheless, their appearance and their fire caused such a panic among the Prussian Guard near the village that "it was 9.15 p.m. before complete order was restored."

That night, Foch concluded his report to Joffre with the words: "The situation is therefore excellent; the attack directed against the Ninth Army appears to be a means to assure the retreat of the German right wing." This was the phrase magnified by legend into the famous message: "My right is driven in, my centre is giving way, the situation is excellent, I attack." Actually, a significant change in Foch's outlook is to be detected. Hitherto he had stimulated his harassed subordinates with the refrain "attaquez," emphasised by dramatic gestures; when they hesitated, or besought reinforcements, he had hurled at them more vehemently the order to attack. But in his orders for the 9th there was a change of tune. His troops were told "to organise as strongly as possible the positions they held," and the only hint of attack was the reiteration that "Fère-Champenoise should be occupied."

Foch's anxiety was still more clearly shown by the fact that soon after 9 p.m. he telephoned to the Fifth Army and asked Franchet d'Esperey to relieve the 42nd Division by taking over its front with his X Corps. However serious Foch's situation, this was a very serious request to make. For Foch's allotted rôle was to cover and assist the Fifth Army, which was engaged in the decisive attack.

Franchet d'Esperey, although embarrassed, responded to Foch's appeal with remarkable generosity and self-abnegation. He not only agreed to relieve the 42nd Division, but placed his own X Corps at Foch's disposal, apparently feeling that only the man who was commanding the spot and knew the situation exactly could carry out a relief. But by divesting himself of a fifth of his army, Franchet d'Esperey inevitably reduced his own offensive effort next day. And the 9th was to be the crucial day

of the Battle of the Marne—the day when the entry of the British and Franchet d'Esperey's left into the gap between Bülow and Kluck led these German Armies to begin a definite retreat. Thus Foch's appeal had far-spreading ripples. A critical analyst might even say that he, rather than his own opponent, helped "to assure the retreat of the German right wing."

Of equal, if narrower, significance is the use Foch made of the troops thus obtained. The X Corps was primarily to safeguard his left flank, although it was ordered to continue "the attacks begun by" the 42nd Division. The 42nd Division when relieved was to move along behind his front "to the line Linthes-Pleurs" in his centre, "where the division will be formed in army reserve." Thus his object in seeking the relief of this division appears to have been primarily that of providing himself with a reserve under his own hand, hitherto lacking. There is no suggestion of using it for a decisive counter-manceuvre, although he seems to have had the idea, mentioned next morning, of using it "to take part in an attack on Fère-Champenoise." He regarded the reoccupation of this village as essential to his defensive line and plan. His attitude at the time was epitomised in his subsequent reflection: "When one knows what one wills everything becomes easy. To stop up gaps one fills them up with mud. . . . It is incredible what one achieves by this system."

If he had been contemplating a decisive stroke, such as legend later pictured, he might have taken an alternative course—that of launching the 42nd Division, on relief, directly eastwards along the south side of the marshes to roll up his assailants' flank and menace their rear. This course, if more speculative, would at least have saved time, have saved the detour behind his front, and have had greater potential effect. In contrast, by moving the 42nd Division to a position behind his centre its attack would inevitably be frontal.

#### SEPTEMBER 9TH

When morning came on the 9th, Foch's plan of moving the 42nd Division to his centre was for a time endangered—in a purely accidental way. Bülow's overnight orders were that his right wing should continue its wheel back; that his centre, acting as the pivot, should simply stand fast; and that the *Guard*

*Corps* on his left wing should continue its offensive attempt to wheel forward. But owing to a misunderstanding one regiment in the centre advanced on its own in the morning mist for nearly two miles. It went as far as Mondement and captured the Château, evicting the party of Humbert's Moroccan Division who had been holding it. Rumour magnified the coup into a formidable attack. This guise it assumes in popular history, and in this guise Humbert not unnaturally saw it at the moment.

Foch, who went up to see Humbert, has paid tribute to his personal calm and the reassurance he gave to his shaken troops. The fact remains that Humbert not only called for and obtained the last remaining reserve of the IX Corps, but also a fraction of the 42nd Division. With the former he launched a counter-attack in the afternoon, and although this failed he regained the Château in the evening. The final storming of the Château has become a French epic, but it cannot be reconciled with the records of the German regiment in possession, which mention that they evacuated the Château as part of the general retirement and without interference from the French. Reconciliation, however, is unimportant now that the insignificance of the episode is discovered. And whatever his apprehensions, Foch did not let the apparent menace deter him from moving the 42nd Division to his centre.

There and on his right a very real danger had arisen. Although the orders were delayed by broken cable-lines, the two Prussian Guard divisions and three Saxon divisions had resumed their attack at 8.45 a.m. Tired as they were, the six French divisions facing them were in even worse state. The XI Corps broke first, although its left division withstood the bombardment until it discovered that its flank was bare. Its retreat in turn exposed the flank of the IX Corps, on the left, which hitherto had only fallen back a short distance—to Connantre. Foch's line now formed an L, chipped in the middle.

"With the object of encouraging our troops," Foch announced later, "the 42nd Division is coming up. . . . The fact that the XI Corps has been obliged to yield ground will in no way prevent us from resuming the offensive with this division, which will attack towards Connantre and Éuvy. The IX Corps will co-operate by attacking the Morains-Fère-Champenoise road. The 42nd Division . . . will be ready to attack about noon."

This hope was to be disappointed, and the instruction to the IX Corps must have sounded rather ironical to the hard-pressed troops, if it reached their ears. By another proclamation at mid-day, as Foch relates, "I tried to communicate to them my complete confidence in our ultimate success." It read thus:

"Reports . . . show that the German Army . . . has reached the extreme limit of its endurance. . . . It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of taking advantage of this situation, and I ask each one of you to draw upon that last spark of energy which in its moments of supreme trial has never been denied to our race. The disorder in the enemy's ranks is the forerunner of victory. By continuing with the greatest energy the effort already begun we are certain to stop the march of the enemy and then drive him from the soil of our country. But everyone must be convinced that success belongs to him who holds out longest. The honour and safety of France are in the balance. One more effort and you are sure to win."

It was a stirring appeal, if the reference to the enemy's disorder may have had a fresh flavour of irony to troops who were retreating in front of him. Again, it must have seemed to them that only a miracle could make Foch's assurance credible.

Yet that miracle came to pass. Its initiation took place just before Foch made his appeal, and its effect on his front began less than two hours later, although his troops were not aware of it until many hours later—and then, naturally, misunderstood it. At the time they were only aware of an imminent menace, before which the IX Corps fell back and the XI Corps made a fresh recoil. "In all ranks there was no question but of retirement." This was presumably the time when, it is said, Eydoux frankly told Foch that it was now too late to expect an orderly retirement, only to receive the reply: "You say you cannot hold on, and that you cannot withdraw, so the only thing left is to attack."

The 42nd Division was now reported to be arriving. So at 1.45 p.m. Foch issued his final orders for its attack, to start at 4 p.m. He followed this by orders to the XI and IX Corps to attack in conjunction with it, while the X Corps co-operated on the far left. These attack orders were to be carried out "*under any and all circumstances.*"

Foch sent Weygand to arrange the practical details and give

the final decision. After consultation with the commanders of the IX Corps and the 42nd Division, Dubois and Grossetti, Weygand postponed the hour until 5.15 p.m. Seven divisions were to be launched, and the arrival of the 42nd Division in the battle-line was to be the signal for the general advance.

But once more events belied both anticipation and subsequent legend. The 42nd Division "arrived too late to be able to engage its infantry before nightfall and only its artillery came into action." Grossetti considered that it was folly to launch his men over unknown country in the dark. The dead-beat XI Corps naturally did not move in advance of the signal. Thus the grand assault dwindled down to the advance of one brigade of the 17th Division on the IX Corps' front. But it met no Germans.

Nearly four hours earlier the German divisions had been suddenly halted in their advance by the receipt of Bülow's order for a general retreat—due to the alarming news that "four long columns" (actually the British 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 5th Divisions) were marching through the open gap between himself and Kluck. Thus salvation came to Foch's men through the turn of events elsewhere, if also through their own guns, which, as on the fronts of all the armies, gave the defence domination over the attack, acting as the candle-snuffer of the German will to advance. How supreme the irony that Foch should have owed salvation to the conquest of the moral by the material!

The German troops were assembled, under cover of rearguards, and set off on their backward march, all of them very tired, but many of them highly disgusted. The rearguard of the *1st Guard Division* was called in at 8 p.m.; after having a meal from the field-kitchens, it heard "a few shots of the French artillery well to the west." This coincides with Grossetti's candid statement that his division only arrived in time to fire its guns in the twilight at the retiring enemy. The Saxon rearguards stayed on the Somme until daylight without seeing any pursuers. For the brigade of the French 17th Division directed its advance towards Morains le Petit at the eastern end of the marshes, where it arrived before daybreak. This is the only apparent foundation for the legend of the Prussian Guard being driven into the marshes, unless this arose from the French artillery's warm reception of the tentative advance made on the first day.

Foch, presumably, was not aware of the way his much-urged



attack had been modified in execution, or of the reason for the German retirement. For even his memoirs, written long after the war, contain no hint of the facts, nor any realisation that it was not "a famous victory." Perhaps time had lent enchantment to the legend in the post-war years. For in 1915, when describing his part to Baron André de Maricourt, he painted a more modest and rather more accurate picture: "The first days I was beaten. The last day it was a question of holding on. Yet I advanced four miles. Why? I don't know. A good deal because of my men. A little because I had the will—and then, God was there."

He had certainly owed much to Providence. His own best part in the battle had been in the realm of the spirit, and there is no reason to doubt the intimate recital of it he gave later. "'You want to break me,' I thought. 'You shall not do it. I'll withdraw if I must, but as little as possible. If my right wing is attacked, I'll hold on by my left; but you shall not pass.' I was filled with a wild obstinacy." "I saw with the utmost distinctness the mission of sacrifice on which my troops were embarked. It was an almost physical vision startling in its clearness, blindingly bright. . . . I kept on saying to myself, 'Even if I have to yield ground slightly, my front must at all costs be maintained.'" Such an attitude compels admiration—for Foch as an individual. But to its effect on the battle there were limitations, as an historical analysis shows. The brightness of his own "vision" certainly blinded him to the facts of the situation, and, paradoxically, obscured the very object to which he had dedicated his sacrifice.

Towards midnight on the 9th, according to what he later told Le Goffic, he was suddenly called to the telephone and heard a voice saying: "We are in the station at Fère-Champenoise." "I gave a start—'Who do you mean by We?' 'Colonel Simon of Moussy's division.' And Moussy himself didn't know it, nor Dubois! These are the surprises of war. I answered, 'Well done! Bravo! Push on! Push on!' And at the same time I called to all my divisions—'General advance! Forward, Grossetti! Forward, Humbert! Forward, Battesti! Forward, Lefavre! You can't do more, Radiguet? I don't care what you say: at 5.30 all your units must be in action. Go along! I don't wish to know anything.' To be sure, each had good reasons

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for dropping out. I was deaf to it all, because one throws in everything, one ought to throw in everything, at moments like that."

### SEPTEMBER 10TH

Foch himself went forward to Fère-Champenoise shortly before midday on the 10th. "I've never seen such a sight. Literally, one couldn't get along in a car, or on horseback, or on foot, the streets were so littered with broken bottles. Ah ! They'd had a carouse the night before, *messieurs les Boches*, such a carouse that hundreds of them were sleeping off their wine in their cellars. I saw some of them on the house-tops running like cats and being brought down with a flying shot. And I also saw Dubois, commander of my IX Corps, one of whose units had achieved this pretty little surprise against Fère, coming to meet me, his injured big toe sticking straight out of his boot. He was with his Chief of Staff, Nourrisson. 'Ah ! you see, Dubois, Nourrisson, things aren't going too badly. Well, to work ! There's still something to do.' I wanted to push on at once to Morains, but Colonel Coffec interposed : ' Don't think of that, General. The road is enfiladed behind the crest by the Boche artillery. It's doubtful if we're even safe in the station here.' ' All right, then, let's go to the station ! ' The roof was burning above our heads while we were studying our maps. The beams were crackling. One paid no attention." It should be added that this fire was not due to enemy shelling, for the Germans were now much farther away than Foch realised. The station had been set on fire and was still smouldering.

Foch was busily occupied in trying to accelerate the pursuit, which had slackened or come to a standstill when the tired French troops made touch anew with some of the enemy rear-guards that afternoon. " It was hard labour. I could do no more at the end of the day." He established himself for the night in the town hall. " Weygand and I lay down on horrible mattresses. There was an infernal noise. We could hear people going up and down that wooden staircase which was over our heads. There was no chance of sleep. At one o'clock in the morning they came and disturbed me to announce that G.Q.G. was making me a Grand Officer of the Legion of Honour. I replied : ' What do you suppose I care about that just now ? Let me sleep.' At three

o'clock an emissary from General Joffre came to bring us some cigars. I said to him, 'Put them on the mantelpiece,' but he also brought some blankets. They were priceless. We each took one and rolled ourselves up in them. It was so cold that we put on all our coats in vain; we were frozen all the same. . . . But no one brought any news."

According to Weygand this was the only night during the war on which Foch missed his sleep until the night when the Armistice was being settled. And according to Weygand the cause was Foch's anxiety to know if the bridges across the Marne were free for his pursuit. But, as we have seen, Foch gave to Le Goffic and Bugnet a more human and less military reason for his sleepless vigil. During it the cigars became a comfort—"for eight days past we had not been able to get a scrap of tobacco."

At nightfall on the 10th Foch's Army had only reached the general line of the Somme, a bare eight-mile advance, although a few detachments had gone farther. The Marne was still over fifteen miles ahead. In an attempt, apart from vibrant orders, to quicken the pursuit, Foch had ordered his cavalry to push on ahead of his right flank straight for Châlons. His original cavalry division had now been reinforced by a second, and he hoped that the Cavalry Corps thus formed would prove a strong instrument of pursuit. He had also "collected at Fère-Champenoise all the lorries that were available, in order to rush infantry to such bridges as might be reported as still intact." Hence his anxiety during the night for the news that did not come. He naturally was the more impatient because news had come from Franchet d'Esperey that the divided right wing of the enemy was retreating in divergent directions, and Joffre was urging an effort to concentrate against the two fractions before they could coalesce. Foch himself, moreover, had a chance of penetrating between the armies of Bülow and Hausen.

But on the 11th, "the march of our columns, notwithstanding the absence of any enemy reaction, had become rather slow." Weariness and rain were causes of delay. But not the only cause. Whatever Foch's delusions as to the situation during the battle, he realised now how fast the enemy were slipping out of reach, and later shed light on the ineffectiveness of the pursuit.

"After the Marne, most of the generals were so 'flummoxed' at having won that they did not dare to do anything more. .

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They were afraid that the situation might change. . . . I sent ahead a general with a Cavalry Division to pursue the Germans. He stopped at the first bridge, and formed up *en cercle* with a Cavalry Corps. . . . When I arrived I asked him, 'What! are you still here? Haven't you advanced?' 'No,' he replied, 'they are much too strong for me? They are overwhelming. . . . I can't sabre them all.'

"'But that,' I replied, 'is not what I am asking you to do. You've got guns; you ought to have used them. . . .' When I saw that he didn't understand at all, and that there was no way of making him understand, I got rid of him: 'Off with you! We shall never understand each other.'

"They dared not do anything. They ought to have pushed and pushed! They refused to believe in their success. That the troops should fail to understand it, I'm not surprised. But those who led them? Intolerable! . . . During the night of the 11th to 12th I saw an Infantry Divisional Commander [Lefèvre, commanding the 18th] who had received orders to advance and had halted before Châlons. He did not dare to enter. And at the *Haute-Mère Dieu* hotel there was the Crown Prince of Saxony and his staff having a final beano. He might have wiped up the whole lot! . . . I went myself to shake them up, to lead them with a stick. Ah! If only I had been there! A column to right, a column to left, another in the centre, and I could have caught them all." A true Gascon touch.

"Yes! one has to lead them with a cudgel. They were superb generals in peace-time, fine soldiers, who knew everything except war. . . . The war they had prepared for, on manoeuvres, was a perfectly conventional war. But what they were called on to do wasn't in the regulations. Poor old regulations! They're all very well for purposes of drill, but in the hour of danger they're no more use."

Although the bridge at Châlons was undamaged, as well as two others above, Foch's Army did not cross the Marne until the morning of the 12th, and then, in his own words, "very slowly." Most ludicrous of all, the Cavalry Corps, directed on the same bridge as the left-wing Infantry Divisions of the Fourth Army, did not cross until after them. Foch had ordered his Cavalry Corps to strike north-eastward beyond the Marne, against the flank and rear of the enemy, who were falling back in front of the

Fourth Army. But, in consequence of the delay, "these had been able to retire in almost complete security, and the cavalry had to limit itself merely to following the rearguards which the columns left behind to cover their retreat."

Foch was in such a bad temper at the delay that, when a lieutenant named Laune, stammering with excitement, came to tell him that the 2nd Chasseurs had entered Châlons, he angrily replied: "Get out, sir. When you're capable of articulating your words properly, you can return."

But his mood had softened when he made his own entry into the town, soon after midday. Ever sensitive to the call of his religion, he is reported to have turned aside the fervent thanks of the Bishop of Châlons with the response: "Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam."

He had early need of the consolation of religion. And gave early proof of the strength of his faith. For next day the belated news came to him, passed on by General Sarrail, that his son Germain and his son-in-law, Captain Bécourt, were dead. Both had fallen on the same day, August 22nd, and close together, in the first shock of the encounter with the German sweep through Belgium. Foch for a moment trembled under the shock of the sorrow. He asked his staff to leave him alone in his office. Half an hour passed and he called them back with the curt words: "Now let's get on with our work." Sympathy then and thereafter he brushed aside with the remark: "Yes, yes, never mind that." But his real feelings, and the source of his endurance, were shown in a letter a week later to his old chief, General Millet. "The affairs of my family are grievous. Bécourt and my son were killed on the 22nd of August near Yprecourt, on the Belgian frontier. I heard of it on the 13th, and I have discreetly broken the news to my wife, who is still at Ploujean. One ought to disregard everything, and yet I quake as I think of the disturbance which is bound to occur there, to the grief of my poor women-folk. For my part I am steeling myself on this subject so as not to fail in my duty. The cruel sacrifice we are making ought not to remain sterile. I am working to this end with all the energy of which I am capable, absolutely full of confidence in the issue of the fight, with the help of God."

When he wrote this letter his troops had been blocked, since the 14th, on a front that ran through Souain and Perthes, due

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east of Reims, and only some fifteen miles north of Châlons. The armies on Foch's left were likewise held up along the line of the Aisne. Vain efforts to advance had merely, apart from serious loss, disclosed the presence of a well-planned and entrenched position. On this line, save for minor fluctuations, the Germans were to stand throughout the next four years.

Yet on September 21st Foch actually wrote: "Things go well. The enemy is retiring all along the line, but the men are scarcely able to make the effort that I want of them." It is clear that Foch did not realise that trench warfare had begun, sealing with barbed wire and machine-guns the triumph of defence over attack. It was the first time in the war that the Germans had stood on the defensive. The French might have deduced, from their recent defensive success under unfavourable conditions, the solidity of the resistance they would meet from an army better prepared than their own for defence. Trenches cancelled the superiority of the French field artillery by nullifying the effect of the "75." The instrument of their salvation on the Marne, it became a blunt tool when the attack had to be launched against an entrenched position.

The attempt was all the more hopeless because, coincidentally with the end of the pursuit, Joffre had sent orders to husband ammunition, especially high explosive shell—the only shell of any use against trenches. At the same time, with curious logic, he ordered the carrying out of "methodical attacks." Foch fulfilled these orders with fruitless loyalty until, happily for his troops, the enemy in turn tried an offensive on September 26th. Happily also this had been foiled by the time a new message came from Joffre, saying that the shortage of ammunition, already critical, might "soon become tragic." In consequence, Foch would receive no more 75 mm. shells for two or three weeks. This fact compelled Foch to cease attacking and to give his men respite.

A week later he bade farewell to them. For on October 4th he was summoned to Joffre's headquarters, to receive once more a higher rôle in a new zone of action. It was the outcome of the new mirage that attracted Joffre's ever-hopeful eyes after the dispersion of his latest.

On September 13th, the very day that his armies came up against the enemy's defensive position, Joffre had telegraphed to the Government: "Our victory is pronouncing itself as more

and more complete and brilliant. The enemy is in full retreat . . . and our advanced guards are treading on the heels of the adversary without giving him a moment to pull himself together." By the following day he discovered that his own troops had been pulled up hard, and had stuck fast. He explained it, as we learn from Poincaré, by the suggestion that "the Germans had no option but to accept battle, and it is our vigorous pursuit which compelled them to do it." When the armies had been halted nearly a week, G.Q.G. was still "drafting daily communiqués so buoyantly optimistic that if Millerand did not correct and water them down, public opinion might be nourished day after day with mere illusions."

Because of his own illusions, perhaps, it was not until the 17th that Joffre decided on an attempt to turn the flank of the German position. By then the German armies had recovered cohesion, and the German command was expecting and ready to meet what was now the obvious, the too obvious, manœuvre.

Joffre had already hampered its prospects by resuming, on the 11th, direct control of Maunoury's Sixth Army on the extreme left, leaving Galliéni to fret his soul within the confines of Paris while watching the fruits of victory slip from the grasp of his slow-thinking superior. Throughout the battle Galliéni's governing idea had been to direct all reserves to the north—towards the enemy's rear. But with his displacement the pursuit became a purely formal frontal advance to the Aisne.

Moreover, the belated initial attempt to turn this trench-line was made by reinforcing Maunoury with a single army corps. Naturally it had no effect. The second attempt, meantime in preparation, was not much larger, although nominally made by a new army. Joffre brought two army corps, as well as the commander, Castelnau, from Lorraine, but he made up the army by taking two corps away from Maunoury. By September 24th Castelnau's outflanking move came to a stop on the Somme, and although reinforced by two more corps was itself so threatened that Castelnau showed an inclination to fall back south of the river. Joffre therefore formed a new Tenth Army, again chiefly by subtraction—from Castelnau—and placed it under Maud'huy with orders for a renewed attempt to overlap the German flank. Meantime, the British, at their own request, were to be transferred from the Aisne to Flanders.

But the limitation of Joffre's vision is shown by the fact that when Henry Wilson, having persuaded Sir John French with difficulty to take the risk, went to see Joffre on the 29th, he found that G.Q.G. were strongly opposed to the idea. Joffre preferred that the British should try a new frontal attack on the Chemin-des-Dames ridge beyond the Aisne. But after sleeping on the proposal he came round to its acceptance, and on the night of October 1st the British Army began, by graduated steps, to slip out of the line on the Aisne for its movement northward.

This inter-allied process of side-slipping, together with Joffre's disquietude over Castelnau's intentions, had a reaction on Foch's position. On September 24th Joffre had asked the Government for authority to appoint Foch as his assistant, and successor in case of accident. If the request was a proof of the good impression that Joffre had derived from Foch's conduct on the Marne, there can be little doubt that it was also inspired by a desire to rid himself of the greater risk of being superseded by Galliéni, who held the official letter of appointment as Joffre's contingent successor. This risk had been increased by Galliéni's part, which might become known, in bringing about the Marne victory and by Galliéni's obvious dissatisfaction with the ways that strategic success had been exploited. In contrast, Joffre did not fear any rivalry from Foch. It was the judgment of some in the inner circle of G.Q.G. that Joffre singled out Foch because he felt that Foch was the only one among the higher generals on whose loyalty to himself he could fully depend.

But when Joffre's request was submitted to the Cabinet, its members were in a quandary. They felt that they could not "brush aside the Commander-in-Chief's request," but also could not take away "the official letter" from Galliéni "without wounding him." Hence they deferred a decision. Joffre then suggested a middle course that was facilitated by the course of events. He would appoint Foch his assistant for the purpose of co-ordinating the outflanking moves, but without a definite promise of the succession to himself. Hence his summons of October 4th.

By 4 p.m. Foch was at Joffre's new headquarters at Romilly-sur-Seine. His mission was explained to him. He was to take control of Castelnau's and Maud'huy's armies and co-ordinate their moves with those of the British and Belgian armies. "Go and see the situation, and do your best."



## CHAPTER X

### THE WATCHMAN OF YPRES

FOCH lost no time in beginning his new task. At 7 p.m. he was back at Châlons; by 10 p.m. he had handed over command of his army to Humbert and was on his way north. Weygand accompanied him—a proof that confidence was now established. At 4.30 a.m. on October 5th they reached Breteuil in Picardy. Sending word to Castelnau that he had arrived, Foch lay down on a bench in the school-house. Soon Castelnau came in, looking very grave, and explained that he had decided to retire behind the Somme, as his exhausted troops could not hold out against superior force, and were “almost done for.”

Foch instantly reacted. “To withdraw you is impossible; it’s essential to hold on at any cost and to die rather than give up an inch of ground. No reasoning will avail in face of the exigencies of the situation. I take entire responsibility; my decision is irrevocable, here’s the order in writing.” “All right, then,” replied Castelnau, “we’ll stay where we are.” They discussed the situation for two hours, drinking black coffee to banish sleepiness.

Taking leave of Castelnau, Foch dashed on northward to Aubigny, where Maud’huy had his command post. The situation of his army seemed even more precarious, and discouragement was manifest on the faces of the staff. Entering “like a gust of wind,” Foch extended his arms and cried: “Maud’huy, I embrace you for all you’ve done, and for all you will do—you hear what I say, *for all that you will do!*”

Then, turning to the staff, he said with a pointed gesture: “Clear out!” They did not await a repetition of the order, but from outside heard him say, his voice rising: “I won’t hear anything! You understand! I won’t hear anything! I’m deaf! I only know three ways of fighting—Attack—Hold on—Clear out. I forbid the last. Choose between the first two.”

It would seem, however, that Foch’s intervention merely reinforced a fresh resolution that was due to news of reinforcements. Maud’huy, a survival from the age of chivalry, who made his sons pray nightly that they grew up like Bayard and du Guesclin, needed less touch of the spur than Castelnau, who

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had been sobered by his opening experience in Lorraine. Foch arranged with Maud'huy that he should "check forthwith the enemy's advance on Arras," while "continuing the effort to envelop the enemy's flank" towards Lens.

Foch then went back to Breteuil. Next morning he went to see Maud'huy again, and, on being told that progress was slight and resistance difficult, he brusquely replied: "Get smashed to the last man, but hold on like leeches. No retirement. Every man to the attack." He then drove to Doullens, town of fateful significance in his future career, where he established his own headquarters. There he had an urgent telephone message from Castelnau, who said that he had been heavily attacked and asked Foch to go at once to Breteuil, as he anticipated that "his line was on the point of breaking somewhere." On arrival Foch found that although the troops had been driven back, the enemy had not followed up his advantage. Once more Foch forbade any change of plan, simply ordering the troops to dig in. And happily the Germans did not renew their offensive in the morning. They in turn were planning a new and wider manœuvre.

Foch was thus able to return to his own headquarters, having travelled 530 miles in the past fifty-seven hours, and enjoy a comparative rest. During the next few days he busied himself successfully towards renewing, unsuccessfully, the offensive effort of Castelnau and Maud'huy. At the price of further exhaustion to the French troops, it left the Germans securely established on the high ground north and south of Arras, and did not prevent them pursuing their northward manœuvre. With such a limited ammunition supply this frontal effort was foredoomed.

A significant sidelight on the attitude of Foch's subordinates is provided by Mayer, who was then serving in a corps on the Somme: "I find in my war-diary that, the village of Monchy-au-Bois having been wrested from us on 8th October, 1914, Foch directed General Brugère, who commands us, to recapture this locality at 7 a.m. next day, a task that was not executed. Whence reiteration on the 9th of the previous order. Same in-success. This continued for several days following, nobody dreaming of obeying, and everybody being amused at the obstinacy which made the headquarters at Doullens repeat the same injunctions. Our generals, holding that they were impossible to carry out, never tried to conform with them."

Foch's own reason for giving such orders was expressed in a conversation with General Maurin at Doullens: "To all pleas I always reply: '*Attaquez! Attaquez!*' They look at me with astonishment; but the goal is attained. I have thus converted, to the offensive, spirits that were longing for rest and perhaps even a rearward movement." But as he did not succeed in changing the enemy's disposition, it is difficult to see what goal he attained. That conversation shed more light on his personal feelings. Speaking of the weariness of certain commanders—Castelnau was obviously in discussion—Maurin referred to the family bereavements that some had already suffered. Foch replied: "They are not the only ones!" And then with a gesture that seemed to sweep aside remembrance, added: "One will think of that after victory has been won." Maurin saw a tear in his eye. But that was Foch's sole concession to human weakness.

On October 8th Sir John French and his staff called to see Foch at Doullens on their way north. Wilson noted in his diary: "Here a guard of honour and bugle, and Foch kissed me twice in front of the whole crowd! Foch absolutely full of fight." Even more important was the impression made on Sir John French, who had already called on Castelnau and found him "anxious and depressed." "We left him after half an hour's visit and reached General Foch's headquarters at Doullens about four. He gave me a great reception with Guard of Honour, etc. He was the exact opposite to Castelnau. He says the enemy is making no headway anywhere, and that he is gradually getting round his flank in the north." "He gave me a kind of tea and champagne party." "It gave me great hope for the future to find him so hopeful and cheery. I explained my plans to him. . . . He was quite pleased and only begged me to come in on his left as early as possible."

From this first wartime meeting is to be traced the strong influence which Foch gained over the British Commander-in-Chief. Just as the reception was nicely calculated to appeal to French's ever-sensitive vanity, so the note of confidence was aptly attuned to the vibrations of his mind. On the one hand, French was nursing the delusion that by going to the "plains of Flanders" he would find scope for manoeuvre—through yet another mirage he apparently visualised that flat and water-logged land, cut up into small fields and criss-crossed with drain-

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age dykes, as "good cavalry country." On the other hand, he was nursing both a grievance against and a doubt of the French. The grievance, which dated from August 23rd, had been fomented by Joffre's recent action in complaining to the British Government of French's inactivity on the Aisne. Only two days before he came to Doullens he had vented his feelings on Huguet, the chief liaison officer with the British: "Never throughout my career have I suffered such humiliation; I have had to come to France to fight for the French for it to be inflicted; I never will forget it." Hence the "perfect tact and deference" which Foch showed him "were particularly pleasing." As Huguet adds: "However strange the proposition might be to which Sir John French's changeable nature and overflowing imagination led him, the General never countered with a refusal or a criticism. His first words were always of approval; then he brought his questioner round gently. . . ."

But the balm to his vanity did not suffice to calm French's doubts. By going on the left would he be once again exposed by his allies? Would he run the risk that he had so narrowly escaped when he originally went on the left at Mons? Foch's air was just the tonic to give him reassurance, and before long Foch reinforced by subtler means his hold on French's trust.

A firm confidence would soon be needed—and all the more because this initial confidence was built on a false foundation. While the successive attempts to overlap and envelop the enemy's western flank were pursuing their fruitless course a new cloud was gathering in the north, soon to overshadow the so-called "Race to the Sea."

Before and since the Battle of the Marne, Antwerp had been galling the enemy's flank and the nerves of the enemy command. For thither the Belgian Army had withdrawn when, already forsaken by the nature of its allies' plan, it was cut off by the German tide. Its presence at Antwerp, and sorties therefrom, had drawn off German forces from the critical battlefield of the Marne. Hence Falkenhayn, who took Moltke's place after the defeat, determined to eradicate the menace from Antwerp, and the last week of September the German forces closed in upon the fortress. Joffre, his horizon narrow as ever, was opposed to the sending of French troops in response to the Belgian appeal. Ignoring the value of a lodgment in the enemy's rear, threatening

the German communications; he suggested instead that the Belgian Army should abandon Antwerp and fall back to join up with the slow, the all too slow, prolongation of his own left wing. Joffre's reluctance to send troops to Belgium acted as a brake on British action; but through the renewed insistence of Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, a small force of marines and naval volunteers was belatedly sent to Antwerp, while a newly formed 7th division of Regulars, together with a Cavalry Division, was landed at Ostend and Zeebrugge for an overland move to raise the siege. The meagre reinforcement delayed, but could not prevent, the capitulation of Antwerp. And the overland relieving force, under Rawlinson, was too late to do more than cover the escape of the Belgian Army down the Flanders coast.

Yet, in the light of history, it is clear that this slight effort applied a brake to the Germans' advance down the coast which just cost them success in their second attempt to gain a decision on the Western Front. For the capture of Antwerp had been the preliminary to a greater move. Four days after its fall, Falkenhayn drew up the plan for a strategic trap in which to catch Joffre's next outflanking manoeuvre—obviously to be expected. One army, the *Sixth*, composed of troops transferred from Lorraine, was to hold the Allied offensive in check, while another, the *Fourth*, composed of the Antwerp besiegers and four newly raised army corps, would sweep down the coast and crush the flank of the attacking Allies. Into this trap Foch was now hastening to lead both his own men and his allies through an excess both of confidence and of the offensive spirit.

On October 10th, when the fall of Antwerp was certain, Foch wrote to Joffre: "I consider our situation very satisfactory. Castelnau is not budging, nor, barring some incidents, are his Territorials. Maud'huy is attacking around Arras. His success is slow but continued. . . . The cavalry has not yet sufficient audacity. I will return to Romilly whenever you desire, but I think I am needed here. . . ." And then in a vital postscript he added: "If you approve and if Sir John French agrees, I propose to advance our left (Tenth Army) by Lille to the Scheldt at Tournai or at Orchies, the British Army moving in the direction of Lille and to the north of that town, and forming line from Tournai through Courtrai. In this way all the French,

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British and Belgian detachments would be united on the left banks of either the Scheldt or the Lys. After that we can see."

To use an apt slang phrase, they would have seen stars. If this move had been carried out as Foch wished, and Falkenhayn equally, it would have laid open the Allied flank to a deadly blow. While the armies were marching east the Germans would have been sweeping south across their rear.

After he had written this letter to Joffre, Foch went to see French. According to Wilson's diary: "Foch turned up and simply said what he wanted done and when." He found French agreeable, and it was arranged between them that the scythe-like eastward swing should be made on the 13th, when the British II and III Corps were expected to be on the scene. French would have preferred to wait until the I Corps also had arrived, and his whole army was concentrated, but he deferred to Foch's urgency.

It is fair to mention that on the 13th, after this offensive had opened unpromisingly, Foch expressed a doubt to Joffre whether it would be decisive in itself without a coincident break-through in the centre. But Foch in no way relaxed his zeal for the offensive. He told Joffre in his letter: "The marshal [French] wishes at all costs to go to Brussels. I shall not hold him back. I shall help him to the best of my powers."

What a contrast between intention and achievement! When the British II Corps began to move forward on the 12th, it found that Maud'huy's left had just fallen back, and although it made some progress itself until the German cavalry opposing it were relieved by two infantry divisions, it did not even reach La Bassée, far less Lille. The III Corps and Allenby's Cavalry Corps, coming up on its northern flank, fared no better, and the result was merely to prolong the line of deadlock as far as Messines, just south of Ypres. Thus, by October 20th, French transferred his hopes to a new enveloping manoeuvre by Haig's I Corps, then arriving at Ypres. But the Germans anticipated him with a heavier stroke.

In the meantime Foch had found his other ally less sympathetic to his dream-offensive. In accordance with Joffre's plan, Foch sought to induce the Belgians to form the tip of his scythe. King Albert, with more caution, or more realism, declined to abandon the coastal district for an advance inland that he considered rash. In this view he was certainly clairvoyant.

Faced with this reluctance, and also with a report that the Belgians might abandon the line of the Yser, Foch hastened to pay them a personal visit. On the 16th he drove to Dunkirk, where he met Monsieur de Brocqueville, the Prime Minister. Foch is said to have declared to him: "The future of Belgium is at stake at this moment: you must hold on whatever the cost. If you go back, it is erased from the map of Europe. We must see the King, to induce him to continue the struggle. Will you come with me and help me in my task?" The declaration was characteristic, if perhaps superfluous, for Brocqueville's views were similar.

Preceded by Brocqueville, Foch then drove to Furnes, long roads filled with an unceasing stream of refugees. Furnes itself was packed with troops, many of them showing the exhaustion of the hard retreat from Antwerp. Foch found the King and the headquarters of his army established in the town hall. Once more Foch indulged in a dramatic appeal. If his account of it be correct, he boldly said: "Sir, if you fall back you lose Belgium and perhaps will never regain it. Give orders that your army stands fast. You are its chief, it will listen to you. Tell your soldiers to cling on desperately to the soil of their country, to dig themselves in, to cover themselves with barbed wire. Hold on for a few days and I will answer for everything."

But on the previous day the King himself had issued an order to his army which declared: "The line of the Yser forms our last line of defence in Belgium, and its maintenance is necessary for the development of the general plan of operations. This line will therefore be held at all costs." In the light of this order it is improbable that Foch's influence was as decisive in preventing a Belgian retreat as he himself came to believe. The King had abundantly proved his resolution, not only in face of the German ultimatum, but after his country had been overrun, when many of his subjects felt they had done enough for honour. To hold on now to the last strip of his country was a natural instinct, having committed his people so deeply. It was equally natural, after such an ordeal, that pessimism should have been manifest at the Belgian headquarters, and there is little doubt that some of the staff were questioning the wisdom of a stand on the Yser. Why should they feel otherwise in view of the neglect of their allies to support them hitherto?

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Because of this feeling, Foch's assurance may well have been a tonic, and a help to the King in counteracting the depression—and was welcome as such. The fact that the King took no offence at Foch's far from tactful phrasing is in itself indirect evidence that he was sympathetic to Foch's sentiments. After the war Foch remarked, in recounting the incident: "I expressed my views frankly and somewhat crisply—in grave circumstances I never mince matters. My royal interlocutor has borne me no malice. He is far too noble to stoop to that. On several later occasions he has reminded me of the scene. 'You were perfectly right,' he said, 'to speak as you did. It was the best way, in fact the only way of making your views felt. The situation might not have been saved otherwise.'" It was only in 1926, when Foch, in an interview, claimed to have prevented him from ordering a retreat, that King Albert made a dignified protest against the inaccuracy of such an assumption.

The French accounts of this interview dwell entirely on the question of resistance. It is only from Belgian sources that we learn of Foch's renewed effort to gain the King's co-operation in the eastward Lille manœuvre. Here "his eloquence" made no impression. But the fact that this persuasion was attempted gives a new significance to the words with which, if M. Bourget's account be correct, he concluded the interview: "At the moment when we are setting out on the conquest of Belgium, people will not understand why the Belgian Army is not figuring alongside us. For myself, a soldier of the Republic, I can assure your Majesty that our cause is just and holy and that Providence will give us the victory." Foch was referring not to the distant but to the immediate future. The words would seem to betray chagrin that the Belgians would not join in his offensive.

But, perhaps through his early training, he was as much a realist in human relations as he was the reverse in strategic views. In this readiness to forgo the ideal for the practicable lay the secret of his success as a co-ordinator. And it is also just to point out evidence that even his military outlook had been sobered by the news that the German forces from Antwerp had just entered Ostend and Thourout, an advance which brought them menacingly close to the line of the Yser. That evening Foch wrote to Admiral Ronarc'h, commanding a brigade of French marines that he had moved up to the Yser: "Under the



present circumstances, any idea of manœuvring is out of the question, and your tactics must be confined purely and simply to resisting on your actual positions. . . . You should find no difficulty in holding your ground."

Foch then drove back to Doullens, seventy-five miles away, and on arrival wrote a report to Joffre of the day's doings. He told Joffre that he had asked the British "to advance Rawlinson's corps from Ypres in the direction of Roulers, in order to divert the German attack from the Belgian Army," which "is established along the line of the Yser. It has been ordered to reorganise there, and to defend itself with the utmost energy. The King and the Prime Minister seem determined to adopt these tactics and to see that they are carried out." The absence of any suggestion that he had overridden a reluctant King is noteworthy. "The British Army is continuing its advance on Courtrai."

Next morning, the 17th, Foch drove to Maud'huy's headquarters at Saint-Pol, where he met Mr. Lloyd George and Lord Reading, who were paying a visit to the front. Foch made a good impression on the future British Prime Minister, not merely by his confidence, but by his apparent realism. For Foch, his thoughts evidently on the Yser, declared: "We are going to dig trenches; they want to break through. They shall not break through." Later in the war, according to Foch, Lloyd George "often said" to him: "You are the man of the Saint-Pol programme," in tribute to his early grasp of the reality of trench warfare conditions. Thus it is interesting, and somewhat ironical, to note that Foch went straight on from this interview to meet Sir John French at Anvin in the afternoon, and to press him to renew his offensive next day.

As we have already noted, the progress was negligible. That same day the Germans made contact with the Yser line. On the 19th their attack developed in strength. Up till now the six weak Belgian divisions had been distributed along the whole line of the Yser from the sea almost to Ypres. But, just in time, two French Territorial Divisions, covered by Mitry's Cavalry Corps, took over the right half of the line, as far as Dixmude, reinforcing Ronarc'h's brigade and linking up with Rawlinson's force at Ypres.

Against the Belgian sector were marching Beseler's three

divisions from Antwerp. Screened by these until the last moment, a greater force was converging against the Dixmude-Ypres sector. It comprised four newly raised army corps (eight divisions) which were formed of volunteers—the flower of Germany's youth—although built up on a frame of trained troops.

Foch, apparently, still believed that his eastward manœuvre could upset the impending German stroke, and even cut the German forces in two. In any case he regarded attack as the best means of defence. If he himself now sought to take the offensive primarily as a counter to the German effort, he took care to conceal this view from French and to nourish the British Commander's uncertain spirit with the idea that an offensive success was within reach. French was a human weathercock. He had already suffered one reaction after the failure of his initial advance eastward; it had led him to discuss with Wilson the idea of constructing a huge entrenched camp around Boulogne. Wilson had promptly warned Foch, who, with tactful guile, had written to French, saying that, while he quite agreed with the idea of constructing an entrenched line behind the front as an insurance, Boulogne seemed too far back. He suggested instead a line along the Bethune-St. Omer canal, and promised to help in its development.

By the 19th French's mind seems to have been swung forward to eastward again by Foch's gusts of optimism. Although Rawlinson's attempt that day to advance eastward on Menin had been abortive, French ordered Haig's Corps to advance north-eastward "with the object of capturing Bruges," saying that "the enemy's strength on the front Menin-Ostend is estimated at about a corps and no more." Yet his own intelligence officers estimated, and underestimated, the enemy's strength as being three and a half corps. As one of these officers later explained: "The old man only believed what he wished to believe." Foch's power of "suggestion" for the moment dominated French's mind. For two more days French persisted in the belief that he was attacking, while, in fact, his troops were barely holding their ground.

For his offensive was still-born, as it clashed with the opening of the German offensive against Ypres and a simultaneous renewal of the German offensive against the southern part of

the British line. Everywhere the British were thrown on the defensive, and in several places lost ground. But French that evening renewed his attack orders to Haig, apparently with the idea that his left wing would still find the enemy's open flank. So on the 21st Haig's Corps duly tried to advance past Rawlinson's flank, only to be first held up and then menaced on its left. The troops dug in where they stood, and, as their left had been swung back, the Ypres salient of now immortal memory was formed.

The same day Joffre, visiting Flanders, had come to see French, and, as an encouragement to fresh offensive efforts, had told him that the French detachment was being increased by the dispatch of the IX Corps. (As the 42nd Division was just arriving to reinforce the Belgian sector, Foch would thus have three of his old divisions of the Marne again under his control.) The weathercock, however, was now veering—back to a former direction.

According to Wilson: "Sir John asked for facilities to make a great entrenched camp at Boulogne to take the whole Expeditionary Force. Joffre's face instantly became quite square, and he replied that such a thing could not be allowed for a moment." (We learn from Poincaré that Joffre on his return complained "rather bitterly about French," suggested trying to have him replaced by Wilson, and made the amazing assertion that French "could have taken Lille" that day "without striking a blow.") Until, however, the French reinforcements arrived, the British Commander was unwilling to give any more offensive order than that "Action against enemy will be continued to-morrow on general line now held." It was a euphemistic way of prescribing the defensive!

Foch still persisted in the offensive idea. Although the enemy's strength was now unmistakable, he ordered his own troops—now forming the embryo of d'Urbal's Eighth Army—to make a general offensive on the 23rd in the three widely spread directions of Roulers, Thourout, and Ghisteltes. At the same time he asked the Belgians and British to take part, the latter again to swing east. If they had done so they would have laid open their flank. Happily the enemy gave them no chance of trying.

Foch's request did not reach British General Headquarters until a few hours before the French attack was supposed to

start. It was also complicated by the receipt of a request from d'Urbal that the British would attack in a different direction, and by d'Urbal's instructions to his own right wing to advance on a line which would take it through the British front. The official history remarks, with moderation, that such proposals "could not be taken seriously." On hearing of them Haig telegraphed to G.H.Q. that "there must be some misapprehension of the situation, that there was no time for concerted action, and every chance of confusion." But his anxiety was needless. The leading French troops did not appear until the afternoon. The enemy's fire at once stopped their attempt to advance, but they were a welcome reinforcement to the line of defence. Their arrival made the two sides approximately equal in strength, numerically, from Ypres to the sea.

Next day, the 24th, the French IX Corps was ordered "to continue to advance." Foch, who was just moving his headquarters up to Cassel, telegraphed direct to the corps commander, Dubois, "All the units of the IX Corps are detrained," which was anticipation, not fact. "Make your dispositions that all these units are employed to-day, and that the action receives a new impulse. There must be decision and activity." The result at least gave an air of vindication to Foch's theory, for Dubois's men advanced over half a mile before they were finally held up, while the British, fighting defensively, lost some ground. But the German records suggest that in the proportion of loss inflicted the defensive was the more profitable, and that by the night of the 24th the new German corps had blunted their fighting edge.

Realising that their effort was spent, the German *Fourth Army* Commander pinned his hopes to a continued effort against the Yser sector, "where a decision seemed imminent." This, if achieved, would open the path to Dunkirk and Calais.

Under cover of darkness the Germans had gained a footing across the Yser near Tervaete on the night of the 22nd. Counter-attacks failed to dislodge them, all the Belgian reserves were used up, and the French 42nd Division, which would have been invaluable for the purpose, had unfortunately been committed to a vain offensive in the coastal corridor near Nieuport. By the 24th the Germans had brought the infantry of two and a half divisions across the Yser to expand this foothold, and the Belgian





centre gave way under the strain. Fortunately it managed to rally on the embankment of the Dixmude-Nieuport railway, whither the 42nd Division was switched, too late for effective counter-attack, but in time to stiffen the resistance. Fortunately, also, Ronarc'h's marines had splendidly withstood repeated German assaults on the key-point of Dixmude.

But the situation was still critical, and next day King Albert sanctioned the attempt to create a water-barrier by opening the locks at Nieuport so as to flood all the country between the Yser and the railway embankment. While the king delayed as long as possible this sacrifice of his soil to the sea, it would also appear that some of the French generals were opposed to a step that would block their own offensive. How far Foch shared their attitude is disputed. He had certainly postponed the Dunkirk inundations; but these were across the Belgians' rear, and aroused their objections. When they found a way of flooding their front, Foch made no objection.

The railway embankment was held, without suffering much pressure, until at high tide on the evening of the 28th the Belgian engineers succeeded in opening one of the locks at Nieuport and letting in the sea. If it crept in slowly, each day brought a fresh reinforcement to the flood, until "it seemed to the Germans as if the whole country had sunk with them, and behind them." With the impetus of desperation they renewed their attack and breached the embankment-line of defence at Rams-capelle. But the rising flood came to the rescue, and during the night the Germans began to retire across the Yser to escape being cut off.

It is interesting to hear Foch's own recital of his action when the Belgian command told him on the telephone of the original emergency. "I said: 'Hold the railway line.' I did not know the ground, but it was either an embankment or a cutting. In any case, it was a line which would be well marked on the map, and it might provide some cover. Everybody can see and recognise it. They must stop and hold on there, that is simple! . . . It was an embankment, and we dug in on one side. Then the floods came, and stopped on the other side. After that we had some duck-shooting! Yes, the Boches were just like ducks. . . ."

The crisis on the Yser had not been the only one, for the

German *Sixth Army* had launched its offensive against the British right (II and III Corps) along a line stretching from La Bassée in the south almost to Messines. The II Corps situation seemed so grave on the 25th, as Wilson recorded, "At midnight Smith-Dorrien came in to report that he was afraid his corps might go during the night. Sir John rather short with him, and I think fails to realise what it would mean." But although Neuve Chapelle was lost, further attacks were beaten off and the German offensive died away before the end of the month.

The crises on the Yser and at La Bassée were the prelude to a greater crisis at Ypres. This, again, followed on a fresh attempt by the Allies to take the offensive, which weakened them for the subsequent defensive struggle.

No sooner had the first crisis at Ypres passed than Foch resumed his offensive—in his own mind he had never discontinued it. That he had again infused French with his own assurance is clear from the telegram which French had sent to Kitchener: "The enemy are vigorously playing their last card." In the night of the 24th French wired again, suggesting that the battle was "practically won."

But on the 25th the Allied offensive made practically no progress against newly wired German defences. On the 26th Dubois and Haig continued the attack, but only advanced a few hundred yards. In contrast, the sharp southern corner of the salient, where Rawlinson's men (the 7th Division) stood, was smashed in by a German attack, and for a time converted into an equally sharp re-entrant. Luckily the assailants did not follow up their success. They were preparing and screening a greater stroke.

A new German army under Fabeck was being brought up, to be inserted like a wedge on the south side of the Ypres salient, between the *Fourth* and *Sixth Armies*. This wedge was made up of six divisions, heavily buttressed with artillery. Its entry into the battle on the 29th would give the Germans a two to one superiority in numbers. With unforesseeing irony, French had just wired to Kitchener that they were "quite incapable of making any strong and sustained attack."

For two days more the Allied offensive was continued without effect, although Dubois had been reinforced by a third division. Faced with a strong line, and themselves provided with little



ammunition, the fighting commanders were wise enough to water down the orders received from behind. And although on the night of the 28th these orders again prescribed the offensive, the troops in front suspected the coming storm.

It broke, over the British front, at half-past five next morning. It was now the Germans' turn to leave the shelter of their trenches and offer themselves as targets. An infantry trained to fire "fifteen rounds rapid" in the minute with the rifle was thus enabled to prove its hitting power, and to produce a leaden counter-storm that obscured its lack of machine-guns so well that its German assailants thought it had "quantities"; they declared that "over every bush, hedge, and fragment of wall floated a thin film of smoke, betraying a machine-gun rattling out bullets." Thus at the end of the day the British front was intact, save at one point—Gheluvelt cross-roads. But Haig, under whom all three divisions had now been placed, had no reserve left intact.

During the day French had been to Cassel for another injection of Fochian serum. Foch told French that he was satisfied with "the advance" of his own troops between Ypres and the sea, but admitted that he was "far from well informed as to their doings." French on his return ordered the British advance to be continued! He also wired to Kitchener that "if the success can be followed up, it will lead to a decisive result." Haig, with the greater realism that came from a closer view, told his troops to entrench, and added that he would postpone "orders as to the resumption of the offensive" until he saw what the situation was in the morning.

The enemy command at the same time were issuing an Order of the Day which said: "The break-through will be of decisive importance. We must and will therefore conquer, settle for ever the centuries-long struggle, end the war, and strike the decisive blow against our most detested enemy. We will finish with the British, Indians, Canadians, Moroccans, and other trash, feeble adversaries who surrender in mass if they are attacked with vigour."

The attack was aimed at the Zandvoorde and Messines Ridges, to break through the southern hinge of the salient with the object of reaching the Kemmel heights. Thus the main weight fell on the 7th Division and on the thin chain of three dismounted

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cavalry divisions which linked Haig's force with the III Corps.

A bad break was made in the left of the cavalry line, where the Life Guards stood, and the enemy gained Zandvoorde ridge, thus compelling the right of the 7th Division to fall back. Another break followed in the cavalry centre near Hollebeke, and led to a deeper retirement. But the war-experienced assailants did not show the reckless courage of the volunteers who had been repulsed earlier, and their caution in following up their success enable Haig and Allenby to "putty up" the gaps. Haig also made an appeal to Dubois, who so generously responded as to send his own small reserve to strengthen the line south of Ypres, where it certainly did more good than in supporting an imaginary offensive on the north.

Foch, back on the hill of Cassel, had little and late idea of what had happened. "Towards the end of the afternoon a first report of these events" was brought to him, but, as he says, "it was impossible for me to estimate their full significance." About 10 p.m. one of his staff came back with word that "there was certainly a gap in the British cavalry front, which they could not fill for want of men. If this breach was not quickly closed, the road to Ypres would be open." Foch at once telephoned to the British G.H.Q. at Saint-Omer to ask for fuller news, but was told that "nothing more definite was known."

So, just before midnight, Foch himself set off for St. Omer. On arrival, he "had Sir John French awakened," and seems to have found a mental depression developing. French declared: "We are all in for it." To which Foch replied: "We shall see. In the meantime, hammer away, keep on hammering, and you will get there. It's surprising the results you attain in this way." To counteract the depression, and to fill the physical gap, he promised that if French would hold on he would send him eight battalions of the 32nd Division, which was just arriving in the French sector. Foch did not get back to Cassel until about 2 a.m. Summarising his action up to this moment, he said, pointing to the map: "I've stuck a wafer there and there and there; then, at Hollebeke, the English broken through, the Boches passing through—a wafer here."

A few hours later, after daybreak, the worst crisis of the whole struggle arose. How strange that it should have come on October 31st, the date most fateful in Foch's early career. The

Kaiser himself arrived to preside over its destinies from a seat in the gallery.

The main attack was once more aimed, with odds of five to one, at the sagging line of Allenby's cavalry. But this line, now reinforced by a few battalions of British infantry and Dubois's timely contribution, stood firm until the attacks died away at nightfall. Half of Foch's promised contribution arrived in time to take over part of the line in the evening.

The crisis of the battle occurred further north—at Gheluvelt on the Ypres—Menin road. Lying on a forward spur of the low ridge—more truly, the undulation—that covers Ypres, Gheluvelt was the last point retained in British hands from which the eyes of ground observers could overlook the enemy's line. Under increasing pressure the line of the 1st Division caved in, and shortly before noon Gheluvelt was lost. The divisional commander, Lomax, on hearing the news, rode back to the headquarters he shared with Monro of the 2nd Division, and laconically remarked: "My line is broken." Half an hour later a shell burst in the room where they were holding a conference with their staffs. Lomax and several others were killed. Only one of those present was unhurt. Control was temporarily disorganised.

Haig meantime had left his headquarters at the White Château and ridden forward up the Menin road "at a slow trot with part of his staff behind him as at an inspection." If the sight of him brought reassurance to the stragglers and wounded who were trickling down the road, the sight of them and the nearer fall of the enemy shells told its significant tale to him. On his return he heard definite news of the break in the line. The menace of disaster drove him to a grave decision. He issued orders for his troops to fall back to a rearward line just covering Ypres, and to hold it to the last, if they could not hold on where they were.

At 2 p.m. Sir John French appeared at Haig's headquarters, where the outlook then seemed at its blackest. He had scarcely need to be told of the critical situation, for he could feel it in the atmosphere. Every reserve had been used and he himself had no reinforcements to offer. White with anxiety, he hurried off on foot to regain his car and go in search of Foch to ask for help. Hardly had he left than an officer galloped madly up to the White Château with news that an aptly gauged counter-attack by one battalion (the 2nd Worcestershires) had tumbled the Ger-

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mans out of Gheluvelt. Its moral effect had been much greater, acting as extinguisher to the enemy's flickering will to attack.

Haig's aide-de-camp dashed after French with the news, and caught him just as he had reached his car. How far the news was clear, and how far French understood its significance, is uncertain. He drove off at breakneck pace on the way to Cassel. But as his car slowed down in passing through Vlamertinghe a French staff officer recognised him and told him that Foch was there, conferring with d'Urbal and Dubois in the town hall. French went thither to catch Foch. In making his appeal for aid he painted a black picture of the situation and the state of Haig's corps. The reality was certainly dark, but perhaps the picture seemed blacker because Foch and French had so long persisted in seeing it brightly coloured. French naturally told Foch of Haig's orders for a withdrawal, and it was equally natural for Foch to regard any limited withdrawal as tantamount to disaster. Foch replied, if his memory of the reply was accurate: " Marshal, your lines are pierced. You have no troops available. You are finished. Then you must advance. If you retreat voluntarily, you will be swept up like straws in the gale. Loss of Flanders, of Belgium, of Calais. Your army thrown into the sea. The Kaiser wishes to enter Ypres. He shall not enter. I don't wish it."

According to Foch, French replied that if his exhausted troops were asked to continue the battle, " there is nothing left for me to do save to go up and be killed with the I Corps." It is possible that the dramatic note was heightened in interpretation. Whether or not Foch replied, " You must not talk of dying, but of winning," he certainly proposed to apply his usual remedy. " I'll attack to right and left." He promised that at daybreak six battalions of the 32nd division—actually two less than he had promised at midnight—should counter-attack on the right flank of the I Corps, while part of Dubois's corps counter-attacked on its left.

He then sat down and wrote out an " informal scrawl," " as much to aid in fixing my own ideas as to furnish them in definite and precise form," to French. It read thus: " It is absolutely essential that *no retirement is made*, and to that end to dig in wherever you happen to be. This does not prevent you from organising a rear position which should join up, at Zonnebeke, with out IX Corps. But any movement made to the rear by a

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considerable body of troops will lead to an enemy push and to certain disorder among the retiring troops. This must absolutely be prevented. . . ." He handed this epistle to French with the words: "There, if I were in your shoes, those are the orders I'd send to Haig."

Of Foch's influence on French there is little question. It is reflected in the note which French now dispatched to Haig along with Foch's memorandum: "It is of the *utmost importance* to hold the ground you are on now. It is useless for me to say this, because I know you will do it if it is humanly possible. I will see if it is possible to send you any more support myself when I reach headquarters. I will then finally arrange with Foch *what* our future rôle is to be."

But of Foch's practical influence on the battle situation at the time there is no evidence. The Worcestershires' counter-attack had saved it before Foch and French had their talk. And before their notes reached Haig he had settled his new line of resistance. For tactical security he had decided to straighten the front of the 1st Division by withdrawing to a line just behind Gheluvelt, while the 2nd Division was to stand on its existing line. And as the enemy pressure had ceased, what Foch said merely confirmed what had already happened. We may admire the spirit that inspired it, but we cannot regard it as materially and historically decisive. It is true that French could have given the order for a general retreat, but such an order was improbable for the simple reason that he had left the battle entirely in the charge of Haig.

For the next ten days Haig's line remained without change and unshaken, save for a minor withdrawal of his right on the 5th to conform to a recoil of the French troops on his right.

On November 1st the main German effort was again made on the flank of the salient, against its southern hinge. This time they tried an assault under cover of darkness, as early as 1 a.m., and the experiment was repaid by the capture of the Messines Ridge. The inward bulge of Allenby's line was deepened by over a mile. But the arrival of the French 32nd Division soon after daybreak relieved the strain, although its counter-attack could not redeem the lost ground. If the other French "attack," on Haig's left, also made no measurable progress, its appearance likewise tended to discourage the enemy from pressing his own attack.

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For Foch, November 1st was a day of activity, perhaps the most fruitful of any during the battle. And this time the effect was not solely in the spiritual sphere. On the previous day Foch had written from Cassel: "To-day has justified my anticipations. To-morrow I shall have fresh forces. We shall attack them [the Germans]. Perhaps we shall finish them. Perhaps more time will be required. The President of the Republic arrives to-morrow. I shall be pleased to provide him with a success." As this letter was apparently written before he heard of the Gheluvelt break, it was certainly an anticipation.

The first reaction of the news of the loss of Messines on the 1st was to bring Foch up to Vlamertinghe, whence he sent a message asking Sir John French to come forward to see him. According to him, French showed a fresh access of pessimism. Foch renewed his exhortations against any retirement, and, as more practical encouragement, told French that he was ordering Conneau's Cavalry Corps to come up from the south, while part of the 39th Division of Foch's old XX Corps had already arrived. Whether Foch overestimated French's pessimism, or whether his own injection caused a change for the better, the one certain fact is that French subsequently wired home that he was much less anxious about the situation. Foch wrote: "The battle continues. It seems to me calmer. More troops are constantly arriving. In a few days we shall be able to renew the attack in full force."

On the 2nd the French attack to reduce the Messines bulge was forestalled by a German attack, causing a French recoil, during which Wytschaete was lost and the bulge somewhat deepened. But most of the French 39th Division and half of the Cavalry Corps arrived to relieve the strain. And the 43rd Division was just detraining. The French now took over the larger part of Allenby's line. Thus they held henceforth two-thirds of the reversed S (S) formed by the Ypres salient and the Messines re-entrant, leaving the weary and intermixed units under Haig's command to maintain the central sector. Worst hit of all was the 7th Division, whose infantry were reduced from 12,300 men to 2,400—a bare fifth of their original strength.

During the next few days Foch pursued his attacks—without progress. While those of November 1st and 2nd by their boldness damped the enemy's will to advance, these later attacks had

no such moral effect to compensate their lack of visible progress. For the German command was marking time until, by combing their line elsewhere, they could bring up six more divisions for a renewed effort. In this, the points of their attack were to be successively closed inward like a pair of callipers. Initially, abandoning the attempt to deepen the Messines bulge, they would place the points against the two hinges of the salient.

While this plan was maturing, Foch came to the conclusion that the German assault was spent, and that they were withdrawing troops from Flanders to redeem their defeats in the East. His conclusion coincided with the enemy's first thought and ultimate action, but not with the enemy's meantime decision—to try one more effort at Ypres. Foch also came to realise the futility of expecting an offensive success where his opponents had failed; for on November 5th he informed d'Urbal that the Belgian theatre had lost its importance, as the Germans had had time to dig in, and that there was now no chance of obtaining any decisive success there. But he did not put any check on d'Urbal's abortive local attacks. When the Messines Ridge was regained in June, 1917, by Plumer's methodically prepared blow, his men would find the foot of the slopes lined with the skeletons—their dingy whiteness flecked with tatters of red and blue uniform—of those Frenchmen who had gone forward with such vain gallantry at Foch's behest into the fire-ringed valley of death.

The tactical consequence of this self-exhausting impulse is to be traced in the dangerous recoil which came on November 6th at the southern hinge in face of the Germans' renewed pressure—itsself a preliminary to their final stroke. At St. Eloi the grey tide came within two miles of Ypres, lapping round the rear of the British, who were holding the nose of the salient. Haig warned his chief that, to avoid being cut off, he would have to fall back to a line through Ypres itself. Foch, however, sent to assure Haig that he would regain the lost ground by an attack next day. At 9.30 a.m. on the 7th he sent a message that the French line had been re-established. But in fact nothing had been done. His men were too dead-beat to respond to orders. And when eventually they were spurred to an offensive effort, it naturally failed, thus failing to remove the menacing wedge that lay embedded in the flank of the salient.

On the 8th Haig went with French to see Foch at Cassel, and found him as exuberantly confident as ever. But it was his indefiniteness rather than his assurance that kept them from fulfilling their intention to fall back to a straighter and safer line. In similar manner, when Wilson was sent by French on successive nights to argue with Foch the wisdom of a withdrawal, the would-be persuasion was frustrated by Foch's jocular reply: "*Double Vay*,<sup>1</sup> if you come to talk to me about Ypres it is vain—because such a place is not on my map."

So, unable to obtain any satisfaction, and unwilling to leave his allies in the lurch, Haig was fain to hold on as best he could, scraping the human putty off one crack to cement another. Happily, if deceptively, the next two days were comparatively quiet along the British sector. Not so for the French.

For on November 10th the enemy struck heavily against the northern hinge of the salient, and as far as Dixmude. The blow was parried, the French profiting by the natural line of the Yser canal, across which their left retired. Its more significant result was to convince the French command that their own line north of Ypres was the spot selected for the enemy's final effort. And thither were diverted such few reserves as they could spare, at the expense of the already weakened southern hinge.

But this blow against the northern hinge had been intended as simultaneous with one against Gheluvelt and the southern hinge (as far south as the Comines canal), for which a new corps under Plettenberg, Foch's assailant of the Marne, had been brought up. It comprised a division of the Prussian Guard and another picked division. As Plettenberg was not ready, the left-hand blow had been postponed.

On the 11th the attack was launched, in a grey November mist, and prepared by the worst bombardment yet experienced. But at all save two points it was repulsed. One was at the actual hinge, where the wedge was driven in as far as the later famous Hill 60. The French detachment there appealed for help to the French and British Corps on either side, but neither could spare any reserves. The "ever-willing" Dubois, however, once more sent his only reserve, and with its help the line was restored. The other and deeper penetration was made in the British line

<sup>1</sup> It is of historical note that the British forces were usually referred to by the French staff as "*L'Armée W.*"



just north of the Menin road. Here the German 1st *Guard Brigade* broke through the weak front of the British 1st (Guards) Brigade—a strange coincidence of history, even though only the remnants of one Guards' battalion were left in the latter brigade. But the Prussian Guardsmen, bewildered by the woods, failed to exploit their success and were driven back by a flank counter-attack.

Although the blow had been heavier than on October 31st, the situation had never been so critical, perhaps largely because it had made less impression on the minds of the commanders in rear—where impressions are always worse. And with the failure of this blow on November 11th—date of prophetic symbolism—the crisis at Ypres finally passed. The spasmodic attacks that continued for a few days, chiefly against Dubois's front, were but the fading flickers of a storm that is travelling away. The relief of the I Corps, so long demanded by Haig, and refused by Foch with the word "Impossible," was now carried out, and the French took over for a time the whole salient.

"First Ypres" had been essentially a "soldiers' battle"—a greater Inkerman. In a memorable sentence General Edmonds has epitomised the situation: "The line that stood between the British Empire and ruin was composed of tired, haggard and unshaven men, unwashed, plastered with mud, many in little more than rags." Its only divergence from accuracy lies in its one deviation from stark simplicity. The British Empire has shown a capacity for survival, even when its military expeditions have actually been driven back to their ships, and when its enemy has been in possession of the Channel ports. And it is by no means sure that, if the Expeditionary Force had been defeated at Ypres, the Germans were capable of following so closely on its heels as to bring disaster. In the light of the succeeding years there is, indeed, reason for regret that Haig did not fulfil his idea of withdrawing to the straighter and stronger line along the canal through Ypres. It would have saved cost and simplified defence. And its hindrance to later attempts at the offensive in Flanders, an impossible country for the offensive, might have been an additional advantage.

The danger at "First Ypres" was certainly aggravated by the failure of Foch, French, and d'Urbal to realise this impossibility. Herein lay their most material influence on the battle. For the

real handling of the battle was left in the hands of Haig and Dubois. Even they, for want of reserves, could do little more than cement the crumbling parts of the defence by judicious thinning of other parts of an ominously thin front. Perhaps to Dubois, for the way he took, not once alone, the calculated risk of parting with his own reserves, is due the highest credit of command earned in the defensive battle.

Foch undoubtedly had a moral influence on the battle, no less by his obstinate refusal to listen to reason than by the unconquerable strength of his will. This never wilted. Detach it from the actual ebb and flow of the battle-line, and we can admire it unreservedly. It made an impression on all who came in contact with it. But one is not able to detect any point at which it touched the men in the battle-line. And where it touched the fighting commanders the effect seems to have become a source more of exasperation than exaltation.

The one sure point where Foch's will fortified another will was at the back of the front—at the allied general headquarters. While some of the claims made for its influence on the Belgian command may be discounted, especially in regard to King Albert, they cannot be disregarded. On Sir John French the influence is more measurable, but here the measure of its effect is inevitably as infinitesimal as Sir John French's influence on the battle.

We may perhaps regard this historical reduction as retribution for Foch's share in maintaining Sir John French in command. This forms a not insignificant episode of the battle behind the front. After the interview with French at Vlamertinghe on November 1st, Foch hurried away to attend a conference at Dunkirk. Thither Kitchener had come to meet Poincaré and Joffre. In imagined privacy Kitchener mooted his intention of recalling Sir John French and replacing him by Sir Ian Hamilton. Joffre and Foch had thought of asking that French should be replaced by Wilson, but they were not favourable to a change for the unknown, which might weaken their existing influence over the British command. On November 5th, Foch told Wilson privately of Kitchener's proposal, and suggested that French himself ought to be told. Next day, according to Wilson's diary: "Sir John and I went to Cassel at 3 p.m., when Sir John thanked Foch personally and in the warmest terms for his comradeship and loyalty. They shook hands on it . . . and the two parted

great friends." Through this breach of confidence, French and his staff were able to take steps both at home and in France to nullify the proposal. Some member of his staff, there is little doubt who, took the shrewd course of informing Joffre, quite untruthfully, that Sir Ian Hamilton spoke the French language even worse than Sir John French. It is needless to emphasise the effect of this hint at G.Q.G., where the inter-allied situation in Flanders was already compared, with caustic humour, to the "Towel of Babel."

Foch's disclosure naturally strengthened his influence over French and assuaged the resentment which French had been nursing since his rather summary treatment on October 31st. It is clear that Foch gauged French's character aptly, if also that admiration for it was not his motive in combating French's recall. For when Huguet earlier told Foch that French was aggrieved with him, he jocularly replied: "Bah! It is of no importance; you have only to tell him that he has just saved England; that will put him in a good humour again!" When Huguet duly conveyed the core of this message to French, he received the gratified if also self-satisfied answer: "But, my dear fellow, I know it only too well. I knew it from the beginning."

## CHAPTER XI

### DEADLOCK

WITH the repulse of the German attempt to break through at Ypres the trench barrier was consolidated from the Swiss frontier to the English Channel. Modern defence had sealed its triumph over attack, and stalemate ensued. The military history of the Franco-British alliance was henceforth to be a story of the attempt to break this deadlock, either by forcing the barrier or by haphazardly finding a way round it.

On the Eastern front also the waters of conflict had become still after a dramatic ebb and flow. At the outset, Russia had

abandoned her tradition of waiting strategy under the influence of her French ally, and had thrown her unready armies into an offensive gamble in which her stake was doubled. Yielding to her own desires, she launched a converging blow against Austria and, through the fortune of catching Conrad in course of a too reckless offensive of his own, swept the disordered Austrian armies out of Galicia. The profit, however, had already suffered a debit.

Yielding to French urgency, Russia had also launched two armies into East Prussia. The threat at least drew off four enemy divisions from the invasion of France. But the danger had been dispersed before these arrived. A young staff officer, Hoffmann, taking the cards from his commander's trembling hand, had reshuffled them ready for his new commander, Hindenburg, to trump the Russian lead. Even though the hand was played with less skill and coolness, it sufficed to win the game. By the victory of Tannenberg one of the Russian armies was almost annihilated while isolated, both were swept out of East Prussia, and the name of Hindenburg became a synonym for success.

Behind him was at once discerned the shadow of his Chief of Staff, Ludendorff, and as further successes followed that shadow would rise above his own figure. But Hoffmann would continue to stand in the shadow behind both, and it was only when Ludendorff left the Eastern Front for the Supreme Command two years later that he parted from his "ghost."

After Tannenberg the next task of this military trinity was to go to Austria's rescue, and in October the Russians were pushed back towards Warsaw. Before it was reached the scales were turned again by the growing weight of Russia's mobilised strength. A huge phalanx of seven armies began a ponderous advance through Poland towards Silesia. Unable to hear the creaking of the machine, the French and British peoples gleefully spoke of the "Russian steam-roller." It would have been a more apt simile to liken the Russian masses to "dumb, driven cattle." They were soon driven back, never again to approach German soil. After a swift lateral move by rail to the northern flank, a thrust up the Vistula against a joint of the Russian phalanx was delivered on November 11th—the day of the final crisis at Ypres. The Russians, narrowly escaping another Tannen-

berg, were forced to evacuate Western Poland, and fall back to winter trench-lines covering Warsaw. Thus the Eastern Front, like the Western, froze into immobility. But the crust was less firm, and the Russians had drained their stock of munitions to an extent that their poorly industrialised country could not make good.

The war at sea had been unmarked by any tidal changes of fortune. It had begun and continued with a deadlock, if a deadlock definitely favourable to Britain and her allies. Its fundamental cause lay in the inherent difficulties of bringing an unwilling naval enemy to battle, a difficulty that had grown as the development of the mine and the submarine reproduced at sea the predominance of the defensive over the offensive that on land was created by the machine-gun. The immediate cause of the deadlock was due to the decision for indecision of the German Naval Command. Realising the inferiority of their surface fleet, and believing that their enemy would still pursue the Nelsonian tradition of seeking battle, they adopted the Fabian strategy of refusing battle until, by mine and submarine warfare, they had weakened the British fleet.

But this plan was nullified by the British action in substituting distant surveillance of their enemy's ports for a close blockade, thus offering few opportunities for the enemy to take toll of their battleships. The British Admiralty, moreover, subordinated the desire of a new Trafalgar to the sure aim of maintaining control of the ocean routes. Her strategy thus baffled, and her own merchant ships swept off the oceans, Germany resorted early in 1915 to a submarine attack on her enemy's sea-borne supplies. This first submarine campaign was a failure for Germany but an aid to Britain, providing her with a lever whereby she could loosen the restrictions which the 1909 "Declaration of London" had placed on her power of surface blockade. Thereby she was able to tighten her grip on Germany's neutral sources of supply. In 1917 the economic pressure would be answered by Germany's second submarine campaign, which, in turn, by bringing the United States into the war, would enable the anti-German surface blockade to be developed into a stranglehold. But in 1914 the artificial restrictions on economic pressure, its inherent gradualness, and the comparative abundance of resources, combined to cloak its tremendous power from the eyes of the Conti-

mental strategists. Their aim was a victorious decision on land; their problem, how to dissolve the trench-bound fronts.

The reaction to the deadlock in the various countries took diverse forms. Even its reality was varyingly appreciated. With the Germanic Powers the opinion of Falkenhayn was the decisive factor. And the impression derived not merely from his critics, but from his own account, is that neither the opinion nor the direction was clear. At first Falkenhayn contemplated a renewed effort to break through in the West. Reluctantly dissuaded from this, he did not undertake an offensive against Russia as a conscious strategy, but rather drifted into it under the compulsion of events. It was the threatening situation of the Austro-Hungarian front which constrained him to send reinforcements thither, and, having done so, he adopted the plan of a limited offensive as the best way of redeeming his liabilities. Even so, he doled out reserves reluctantly and meagrely, enough to secure a delusive success, but never in the quantity or the time for decisive victory.

What was more creditable to his foresight, he realised that a long war was now inevitable, and sought to develop Germany's resources for such a contest of endurance. The supply of munitions and of the raw material for their manufacture was tackled so energetically and comprehensively that an ample flow was ensured from the spring of 1915 onwards—a time when the British people were only awakening to the problem.

The autumn of 1914 was also signalised by the entry of Turkey into the war on Germany's side, a diplomatic success that was prepared by assiduous courting, expedited by Turkish fear of Russia, and consummated by military events. It was a success that Falkenhayn counted as of "decisive importance"—first, because it placed a barrier across the channel of munition supply to Russia, and, secondly, as a distraction to the military strength of Britain and Russia.

In Britain, the effect of "First Ypres" was to give the people some share in Kitchener's vision. The little professional army in sacrificing itself became the advanced guard of the nation. Whereas the Marne and its mirage of victory had obscured the impression of the frontier battles, Ypres brought home to the nation the scale of the struggle and its demands on man-power, if its material needs were not yet realised. By the end of 1914

nearly a million men had answered Kitchener's call. Curiously, the civilian people in England caught the long-range rays of Kitchener's vision earlier than the chiefs of the army in France. Henry Wilson remarked that Kitchener's "ridiculous and preposterous army of twenty-five corps is the laughing-stock of every soldier in Europe . . . under no circumstances could these mobs take the field for two years. Then what is the use of them?" For he was blinded by the radiance of the G.Q.G. vision which made the Rhine appear only a few steps distant.

Galliéni was expressing doubts whether it was possible to pierce the trench barrier; Franchet d'Esperey was already suggesting an alternative move in the Near East. But those who held the power of decision had lost none of their confidence after the experience of Ypres. Was it a comparative remoteness from the battle-line which generated this atmosphere of unreality?

On November 15th, the day of the Prussian Guard attack, Wilson "went out to see Foch at 11 a.m. . . . Long strategical talk, in which we agreed that Germany has still one chance, and one only, namely to shorten her front on this frontier sufficiently to allow her to transfer twenty to thirty corps to Russia, thrash the Russians, and then come back to us. To do this she must retire to the line Liège-Metz, or possibly even to the Rhine. Any middle course would be fatal to her."

This argument was reflected in the report which Foch made to Joffre on the 19th. He began with the assumption, a true one, that "the German plan had failed," and added, less truly, "Better still, we ourselves are in perfect condition, both morally and materially, for attacking them." It would seem an example of introspection rather than of observation. "Whatever solution they may apply to the problem—and there are many to choose from—they cannot help withdrawing troops from the Western front and so reducing the length of their line. The first front on which they will make a serious resistance will doubtless stretch from Strasbourg through Metz, the Meuse at Mézières, Namur, Brussels and Antwerp." The reasoning recalls, and excels, that Moltke-like assumption which is so severely criticised in *La Conduite de la Guerre*, and is less academically known as "counting your chickens before they are hatched."

Foch showed truer foresight when he passed on to discuss the

"characteristics of the war." "What are its requirements? A large number of siege guns, *with plenty of ammunition.*" He also stressed the importance of grenades and of engineers, and added: "I have an idea. Has not the experience gained in boring artesian wells and constructing the Paris Underground (*tubes Berlier*) brought to light mechanical means much more rapid than the old ones for running mine galleries and shoring them up, so that heavy charges could be exploded under certain points of the enemy's defences?"

Here he showed a prevision of that mining development which, although tardy, attained a triumph in this same area, at Messines, in June, 1917. The ingenuity of his idea fell short of another conceived, but still-born, in 1915 by the joint brains of Colonel Swinton, the official "Eye-witness" at General Headquarters, and of Major Norton-Griffiths, the well-known mining engineer. Their idea was to run tunnels which should have their concealed exits behind the German line. Then at a given moment, in conjunction with a frontal assault, parties of machine-gunners should emerge from these tunnel-mouths and spread confusion in the enemy's rear. Highly ingenious yet not impracticable, the scheme was one well calculated to cause the collapse of resistance on a chosen sector. It remains one of the great "might-have-beens" of the war, for when submitted to the Chief Engineer at General Headquarters its originality made no appeal. Perhaps if the authors had known that Foch's mind was running in a similar "tunnel," the outcome might have been a different one.

When Foch came, in his report, to discuss the "*place* to choose for an attack," his originality dried up—unlike the place chosen. "The fate of Europe . . . has always been decided in Belgium. . . . A strong attack with our left to begin with, a strong attack with our right [from Verdun] to finish—that is the sum and substance of my idea. . . . I remain faithful to pure theory—that which asserts that it is the destruction of the enemy's military force which will settle everything."

The value and cost of that theory were to be shown during the succeeding years. Its practical limitations did not apparently occur to Foch. He did not pause to ask whether without a key to unlock the barrier he might destroy his own military force faster than the enemy's.



It is fair to say that he concluded his report with the statement: "Our offensive has yet to be organised with a view to operations against fortified positions, in other words siege warfare on a vast scale." But it is too much to say that his offensive operations were organised as siege operations. Nor can we say that he took due account of the time factor. It is not easy to reconcile his view of material requirements with the early date of the offensive. The time factor can be impaired by undue haste as well as by undue delay.

Foch had in view an attack by d'Urbal's Army on the Wytschaete-Hollebeke sector, in co-operation with the British, and one by Maud'huy's Army just north of Arras. Joffre incorporated this project in a grandiose plan of his own. It has been said that this was hastened by reports that the Germans were withdrawing troops for dispatch to Russia, but, on the other hand, Joffre dictated a message to the Grand Duke Nicholas in which he said: "I do not believe in any important transport of German troops from France to Russia."

That same day, December 7th, he issued his orders. Barely a week was allowed for preparation. The main thrusts were to be near Arras and in Champagne, while all the other armies were to make subsidiary attacks. Joffre's orders emphasised his "hopes that the whole effect will be, not only to push the enemy towards the north-east, but to cut his communications with Germany."

The offensive proved not merely a failure, but a fiasco. Near Arras it began on the 17th and was abandoned on the 23rd. In Champagne it was launched on the 20th, along a twenty-mile front east of Reims, and all that the attackers could claim for their heavy loss of life was the capture of the front-line defences. The Army Commander, Langle de Cary, had, indeed, told Poincaré that it would be "much better to mark time for a while" until he had sufficient heavy guns and an unlimited supply of ammunition for the "75's." "The Germans are far too strongly entrenched for us to secure any decision." The attack south-east of Ypres, on the 14th, gained less and spent less. No one, in fact, beyond Foch showed a desire to do anything. And the only effect was on Franco-British relations.

On Churchill's initiative, supported by Kitchener, and temporarily adopted by French, a British proposal had been made for a combined naval and military operation to recover the

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Belgian coast. For this purpose the British Army would be shifted anew to the left of the Allied line, and so the proposal was made direct to the French Government. Wilson recorded in his diary: "Foch came to . . . tell me that Millerand had sent him a copy of the precious document sent by Winston, K., Grey and Asquith about our going on the left. Foch much amused. Millerand put this down to Kitchener, but Foch is right in putting it down to Winston. Of course, Foch treats it with the greatest contempt. We went down to see Sir John; he was quite apologetic about the left-flank scheme, and said it was Winston's idea."

Joffre was equally emphatic in disapproval. His offensive was about to begin, it was sure to succeed, and this "eccentric" move could be no help to it. The British were now completely in the line south of Ypres between Messines and La Bassée, where they were well placed to take part in his offensive—although the strategic choice of this place for an attack overlooked the tactical fact that the troops were embedded in the mud. A Commander-in-Chief could not perhaps be aware of such trifles as that they were still suffering the exhaustion of their defence of Ypres; that they had not sufficient clothing to provide a change of uniform; that the shortage of boots was increasing the new ravages of frost-bite; that there was scarcely any material for building dug-outs and revetting the trenches—not even enough picks and shovels to dig and deepen trenches. Unlike the Germans, they had as yet no grenades or trench-mortars. They were able, it is true, to improvise some—with results that were more often disastrous to themselves than to the enemy. It would be interesting to have an estimate of the attrition suffered by the British Army from its own trench weapons in the first year of the war.

Sir John French this time did not share the confidence of Joffre and Foch. "He impressed on every commander that he was not on any account to get ahead of his neighbours in the attack—everybody was to wait for the man on his left." And in the event everybody did wait, including the left-hand man—after his men had been held up by wire entanglements. No wire-cutting by the artillery had been contemplated. But the French attack, on the British left, was no more effective or energetic. The offensive was thus an undistinguished repetition of that

mutual courtesy in waiting extolled in the immortal verse about "Lord Chatham and Sir Richard Strachan." But the British were perhaps the less skilful in disguising their half-heartedness. For they certainly became the target for Joffre's disappointed ire, and the butt of G.Q.G. criticism. Its members scarcely concealed their opinion that the British Army "might be helpful to hold the line and act defensively, but would be of little use to drive the Germans out of France."

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Wilson was very concerned over this bad impression made on the French. His diary mentions a visit paid to him by Foch on the 17th. "I made the best case I could about advancing in echelon from the left, and he listened without saying a word. At the end he said, '*Mais, mon cher Wilson, nous sommes militaires, pas avocats.*' That exactly expresses the straits I was pushed to. We discussed everything, and he was as nice as could be; but '*Père Joffre n'est pas commode,*' and it was clear that Sir John would be in a very difficult position if he did not put up some fight."

Huguet sheds light on Joffre's resentment against French—"their relations, which had never been trusting or cordial, became colder and colder." "These differences were unfortunately accentuated on the French side by the character of the Commander-in-Chief, little skilled in the management of men and in overcoming difficulties. From the time when, as a result of the victory of the Marne, General Joffre had seen his confidence, prestige and authority grow bigger, he laid claim—in the name of unity of command—to a control over the British Army to which Sir John French submitted with increasing difficulty." And the pages of Poincaré's *Memoirs* bear witness to the increasing bitter complaints made by Joffre about Sir John French and the British effort.

Foch was more sympathetic, more understanding, and more astute. He had urged, with all his violence of gesture, that a greater impulse should be given to the British attack, but he rarely slipped into violence of language. He sought his aim through persuasion and suggestion, realising not merely the futility but the recoil of an attempt to give orders. His was no easy task. Placed geographically between the German devil and

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the deep sea, he was placed psychologically between Joffre and French. And admirably, on the whole, did he balance himself on the precarious rail between the slow-burning anger of the French commander and the spontaneous combustion of the British. Joffre's confidence in Foch remained unshaken. In preserving it, Foch again found the value of not preserving others' confidences. For it would appear from Poincaré's *Memoirs* that Foch told Joffre that M. Doumer had recently said to him at Cassel: "If I become Minister of War I shall remove Joffre, who is incapable, and I shall make Galliéni Commander-in-Chief." It is possible, of course, that this was a stretch of imagination rather than a breach of confidence, for it would seem unnaturally foolish for Doumer to disclose his idea to one who was himself the alternative candidate for the command. But Foch at least had the credit for his loyalty to Joffre.

There are, however, some curious incidents, not easy to explain. If we are to believe Clemenceau, Foch asked for a private interview with him at the end of 1914, in order to sound him as to a change in the high command. The following month, while he was driving with Joffre to Dunkirk, their car collided with a broken-down lorry. Foch escaped unhurt, but Joffre was badly bruised and was taken back to his headquarters. Foch himself has related: "I was greatly disturbed and asked myself, 'What would happen in the case of a serious accident?' As his deputy, I accordingly wrote to the Ministry of War. . . . A long time afterwards I received a reply telling me that General Galliéni had a letter of appointment, dated as far back as August 1914. That was not the best way out of the difficulty. Galliéni would have been quite new to the situation, and would have had to grope his way."

From Foch's *Memoirs* we learn that the Ministry had replied, rather caustically, that he need not concern himself. In view of his close relations with Joffre, it is curious that he should not have been informed of the situation. For, as we have related, Joffre had asked the Government in September to nominate Foch as his successor in case of need, as well as his "adjoint" in Flanders. Joffre certainly felt uncomfortable as long as Galliéni held the nomination, and his feelings were manifested in his repeated evasion of the call to give Galliéni an active command. As the embarrassed Prime Minister, Viviani, truly said, "It

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seems to require a good deal of diplomacy to arrange military matters."

Some may deem that Foch's enquiry was inspired by the idea of suggestion rather than the desire for information. Yet against this sceptical view we need to remember that we hear of the enquiry from Foch's own lips. Perhaps the truest explanation is that if Foch was spurred by ambition it was not, primarily, a mere personal ambition. Few men have shown a greater sense of self-subordination to a cause. But in sinking all his personal affections and desires in that cause, he identified himself the more completely with it, and thus became identical with it in his own eyes. The confusion is natural, and is often to be discerned in the world's great men.

Feeling that he himself was capable of guiding the cause to a true and successful end, he was driven to make use of all opportunities which might give him fuller power of guidance. We may feel that sometimes his means were open to suspicion, open to question; that they savoured of what the Protestant world is apt to denote by the term "jesuitical." But the end was pure. This the most critical student is drawn to believe as his study of Foch extends, even though he may still feel that the end was more pure than true.

This conclusion would also explain what is more difficult to justify—Foch's comment on Galliéni's nomination. Rationally it is far-fetched. Galliéni had shown his capacity, a supreme capacity, to grip the situation on the Marne, where there was far less time for contemplation. He had, further, grasped the conditions of trench warfare before Foch had begun to grope his way towards reality. It is far clearer that in Foch's comment the wish was father to the thought.

But it is of historical interest to note that when, in March, Joffre again pressed the Government to allow him to designate his own possible successor—as he would "never, in any circumstances, allow Galliéni to replace him"<sup>1</sup>—the agreed choice was not Foch, but Dubail, the calm-mannered commander of the Eastern Army Group.

Foch was the other Army Group Commander. On January 5th he had been formally given command of the Northern Group of Armies, while Joffre himself retained immediate command of Poincaré, *Memoirs*, 1915, p. 59.

the Centre Group—an unsound arrangement—until June, when Castelnau took it over.

During the comparative lull that followed the autumn crisis at Ypres, Foch himself found little rest. It was not in his nature to be quiet. Yet there are incidents recorded which show him in less vibrant light. Thus, for example, just as the German attacks were dying down, Lord Roberts came out to France. Accompanied by Wilson and by his son-in-law, Major Lewin, he visited Foch at Cassel, renewing amid the turmoil of war the memories of how they had foreshadowed it in the quiet of Englemere. Fittingly it was a day of storm and rain, and, unhappily, the aged Field-Marshal caught a chill. Next day he had passed to eternal quiet—as Wilson recorded, in a sentence that does something to redeem his diary: “The story of his life is thus completed as he would have wished himself, dying in the middle of the soldiers he loved so well and within the sound of the guns.” Foch attended the funeral service at St. Omer on behalf of the French Army.

A fortnight earlier Foch had been host under happier auspices. Poincaré paid a visit to his headquarters at Cassel, and recorded: “It is impossible to imagine any finer observation post, and from the window where our table is laid we have a splendid look-out over the Flemish Plain stretching at our feet, dotted by thirty-two towns, the plain which, century in century out, has been the constant theatre of battles of every sort and size. What Foch does not know is not worth knowing about the victors who have preceded him at Cassel—Robert le Frison, Philippe le Valois and the duc d’Orleans; he has military history at his finger tips, and his talk is brimming over with anecdotes and comparisons. . . .” Poincaré was even more gratified to hear, from Joffre, that “Foch has gained a happy influence over the British Field-Marshal,” and that in consequence Joffre no longer wished, at the moment, to secure Sir John French’s removal. On a later visit Poincaré made the interesting comment, “Foch . . . is as careful of my safety as he is careless of his own. . . .”

At the end of November, King George came on a visit to his own army, and, while in Flanders, decorated Foch with the Grand Cross of the Bath.

Soon afterwards, Foch was concerned with the internal affairs of the British Army. In his ultimate counsel he showed good

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judgment, and a better perception of his allies' character than some of his compatriots. Wilson and the French chiefs had been working to secure the removal of Archibald Murray from the post of Chief of Staff to Sir John French, and the intervention of the French Government had even been enlisted. But in a letter to Joffre on January 5th, Foch said:

"My telegram in cipher dispatched to-day gave you a brief account of my knowledge of Field-Marshal French's intentions with regard to a prospective change in his Chief of Staff. Whether he has asked to keep him I do not know; I do not think so. But he may have abstained from asking for his recall, he may even have reacted against some of our manœuvres for having him recalled. For I know that when he learnt of the steps we had taken he said that in those circumstances he could do nothing.

"English pride demands that Murray stays where he is. Anyhow, Lord Kitchener and Mr. Asquith would not hear of General Wilson as his successor. . . . When Murray is recalled and Wilson has gained people's confidence, I believe that we shall be able to progress; it seems in our interest to leave the affair at that. We might waste time and energy otherwise. The Field-Marshal is asking why we cannot busy ourselves with our own affairs and leave his alone. . . ."

This account is supplemented by a passage in Wilson's diary of which the pith is: "Anyhow, the net result is that Murray is more firmly established than ever, and Sir John hinted that the less work I did the better. I might go to Russia and see what they were doing there. How funny! . . . I cannot get up any sorrow at not serving him or Asquith or K. as Chief of Staff." Thus, also, do we understand Wilson's entry on New Year's Eve: "And so the year goes out in wind and rain and sobs. . . . Foch came to see me and to wish me a happy New Year."

A few days later Foch was able to give Joffre more cheering news, and a tactful hint:

"General Murray is leaving the English Army, ostensibly because of his health. It might be advisable to make another distribution of medals among the English generals. The Field-Marshal wished to remind me of it. Murray is replaced by General Robertson, a good choice in default of Wilson. Wilson remains head of operations and of relations with us. His status

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has not been raised, but his position is growing more important. That is the chief thing. . . ."

This was not exact. Wilson had been given the title of Principal Liaison officer with the French Army, but ceased to be Sub-Chief of the General Staff; in compensation he was made temporary lieutenant-general. The change ostensibly deprived him of influence over the British operations and so threatened to diminish his value to the French, but through his personal influence with Sir John French he retained much of his power—at the expense of Robertson.

Thus he was able to aid G.Q.G. in rallying Sir John French to join in resisting proposals for a move in the Near East as an alternative to frontal assaults on the trench barrier. It was the easier to ensure French's opposition because Kitchener leant to the opposite view.

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In a letter to French on January 2nd Kitchener discerningly said: "I suppose we must now recognise that the French Army cannot make a sufficient break through the German lines to bring about the retreat of the German forces in Northern France. If that is so, then the German lines in France may be looked upon as a fortress that cannot be carried by assault and also that cannot be completely invested, with the result that the lines may be held by an investing force, whilst operations proceed elsewhere." French promptly became almost as confident of a break-through as were Joffre and Foch. Yet while asserting his faith in his reply, he somewhat inconsistently added that the ultimate decision would have to be gained on the Eastern Front.

The British Cabinet, especially Lloyd George and Churchill, shared Kitchener's view. Feeling that the trench-front in France was impregnable to frontal attacks, they had strong objection to wasting the man-power of the new armies in a vain effort, and at the same time felt increasing concern over the possibility of a Russian collapse. When this was told to Joffre he declared that they were "demented." They had not to wait many months for the unfortunate vindication of their view.

In a paper of December 29th the Secretary of the War Council, Lieutenant-Colonel Maurice Hankey, emphasised the deadlock and suggested that Germany could be struck more effectively



through her allies, especially Turkey—he might with justice have adduced the example of Napoleon in 1796. His proposal was that the first three of the newly raised army corps might be used for an attack on Constantinople, if possible in co-operation with Greece and Bulgaria. It would, he argued, be a means not only to overthrow Turkey and bring the weight of the Balkans into the scale, but to open a line of supply with Russia, already suffering a shortage of munitions while possessing a surplus of wheat. In comment on this proposal it is worth mention that a strategic reserve of exactly this size was the instrument by which the Germans obtained their three great successes of 1917.

Lloyd George went further, advocating the transfer of the bulk of the British force to the Balkans, both to succour Serbia and to develop an attack on the rear of the hostile alliance. This larger-scale move found more support, curiously, in France than in England, and amongst soldiers as well as statesmen. Franchet d'Esperey had been its first advocate, and in January, 1915, Galliéni suggested a landing at Salonika for a march on Constantinople as a preliminary to an advance up the Danube with an army strong enough to encourage Greece, Bulgaria, and Rumania to join with it.

But all such suggestions, whether British or French, met with the strongest resistance from Joffre, with French in tow. The French Cabinet, as Poincaré's *Memoirs* have vividly revealed, weakened at the knees whenever confronted by Joffre. His prestige had been so enhanced by the legend of the Marne that a mere hint of resignation produced abject submission to his will.

In England political opinion was strengthened by the presence of Kitchener in the Cabinet. But the French Cabinet's surrender to Joffre weakened him, for his loyal support of both French and the French was carried to the pitch where he sacrificed his own truer judgment. Just as his affection for France was an earlier instinct than his love of the East, so it now took priority over his belief in the opportunity that the eastern theatre offered. Thus far-reaching was the sequel to his service of France as a young volunteer in 1870.

At the War Council meeting on January 8th he himself suggested the Dardanelles as the most suitable objective, and thought that 150,000 troops would suffice—a figure that agreed with

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Hankey's estimate. But he said that for the moment no troops were available, as he anticipated that the Germans were about to make another bid to break through in the west. In this anticipation he read Falkenhayn's mind aright, but not the conclusion into which Falkenhayn finally drifted. Drift rather than decision also marked the Allied plan. Only the military chiefs had made up their minds definitely—to attempt the impracticable. But their singleness of aim, however impossible, sufficed to nullify all others. And they profited from Kitchener's fear of a German offensive in the west to drag him, and his new armies, into repeated Allied offensives whose futility he clearly saw.

The Dardanelles scheme did not die, but was emasculated. It received artificial respiration from Russia's passing need for relief from Turkish pressure in the Caucasus. The outcome of the Grand Duke Nicholas's appeal for a diversion was the British Cabinet's decision to try a purely naval attack on the Dardanelles, in default of available troops. When this failed, a failure accelerated by "heart failure" in the naval command, British prestige was too far committed and the naval attack was converted into a land attack—against a forewarned foe. Worse still, the initial forfeit of surprise was followed by the disregard of all other conditions of success. Effort was never in time or in the force for a decisive result.

If the British had used at the outset even a fair proportion of the force they eventually expended in dribbles, it is clear from Turkish accounts that victory would have been theirs, and equally clear from German verdicts how far-reaching would have been the effect on the main enemy.

In weakening the chain of action, Churchill's perhaps too exclusive sense of the importance of time and Kitchener's reluctance to spare force in time combined to cause a double strain. But the real cause of fracture was the opposing pull of Joffre, backed by Foch, Wilson, and French. If it is to the discredit of the Cabinets that they failed to impose their own truer and wider view, it is also to the discredit of the military chiefs in France that they failed to practise that "intellectual discipline" which Foch had so eloquently preached.

Poincaré on January 7th records: "Joffre is dead against any operations in the Near East, and tells us that he requires all the

men that we can possibly send him . . . he has good reason to think that, a little sooner or a little later, we shall pierce the German lines." "His tone is as creamy as ever, but he speaks his mind very distinctly and leaves us in no sort of doubt as to the fixity of his conviction; and Viviani, Briand, and I feel that for the moment we can do and say no more." Poincaré went on the 11th to see Foch again at Cassel, and found him "as impetuous as Joffre is serene, but equally confident."

When Poincaré saw some of the Army Commanders, however, he discovered that "the more junior the General, the less rosy is his outlook." He became still more doubtful when his old colleague Messimy, now serving with the army and decorated for bravery, came to tell him: "At Chantilly [where G.Q.G. had now taken up its abode] they are living in a glorified fool's paradise, and know little of the actual happenings in the fighting-line. Local offensives are ordered to feed the press communiqués, and these offensives are costly in life and foredoomed to failure." Knowledge of the facts and their own impotence occasionally led to hysterical outbursts in the French Cabinet, but its members came to heel at the hint that if "they worry the Commander-in-Chief, he may very likely tender his resignation, which would upset the army and the country alike."

Henry Wilson's diary also sheds several gleams of light on this period, and on Foch's attitude. Churchill had crossed the Channel to see French with the object of persuading him to agree that the Regular 29th Division, now ready in England, should be sent to the Near East instead of to France. French consulted Wilson. Perhaps with a little prompting from Wilson—"Sir John told me to get the French to combat the idea for all they were worth." They at least did not need much prompting. When, a few days later, Bonar Law, the leader of the Opposition in Parliament, came to St. Omer, Wilson "sieved the opportunity to deprecate strongly the project of diverting any troops to the Balkans, and also to convey the intimation that Joffre and Foch were both entirely opposed to anything of the sort."

A day or two earlier, on February 3rd, Wilson had visited Foch, and talked over the recent crisis in his own affairs. "Foch had not seen me since all these troubles, and he was as nice as could be. He said he would have resigned if I had gone, etc." "We discussed the situation. He does not expect the Russians

to move until the end of March. He thinks that the Russians can hold Warsaw, and as they will slowly get stronger their position becomes better." The deduction overlooked material factors, especially the munition shortage, that only the opening of the Dardanelles could relieve. "He hopes the Germans will attack here, and he thinks that after the mud is gone he will be able to blow down opposition with guns. He said a curious thing: 'You English must not invite a long war by dilatory action; we French cannot go on for years, so send everyone you can as fast as you can.' This has set me thinking, and I am not sure what it all means. Can France be getting tired, as well as getting cross with us?"

Foch's implied criticism of the British also overlooked material factors. For while the French were overcoming the shortage of shells from which their troops had suffered in the autumn offensives, the available allowance for the British field-guns at this time was limited to four rounds per gun per day! Moreover, high-explosive shell, alone of use against trenches, formed only a small proportion of the whole supply; this was the fault of the pre-war General Staff, which, unlike those of the Continent, had neglected the evidence of the Balkan War of 1912.

It would seem that Foch's criticism was based on a non-material assumption. For in Wilson's record of a conversation with Foch—after the December failure—we find: "He agreed with me in thinking that the French Army of to-day is much better than that of August last. He agreed in thinking that this was due to great changes in superior commands, to the mental effect on both French and German minds in August of the events of 1870, and the consequent gain in *moral* on the French side and loss on the German as the campaign developed. For the English, the voluntary system is quite sufficient to account for the marked deterioration." The meaning of this badly expressed sentence would seem to be that the French had now shed the sense of inferiority, and the Germans the sense of superiority, which had, as a legacy from 1870, influenced the result of the opening encounters. If French morale was at the end of 1914 so much superior to British, one wonders how Foch accounted for the failure of the much larger-scale French offensive to achieve more success than the British. For the logical inference did not



reflect well on those "changes in superior commands" which had brought into his hands the direction of the offensive. His assumption, too, of the decline in German morale was hardly borne out in the battles of 1915.

Early in February Joffre formulated his offensive plan—that of converging blows from Artois and Champagne upon the great salient formed by the entrenched German front, to be followed by an offensive in Lorraine against the communications of the German armies. The idea was similar to that of Foch in 1918, but a vital difference lay in the conditions existing, the methods employed, and the material available. Only in man-power had Joffre even a superiority, and there only a narrow margin—in January 85 French, 13 British, and 6 Belgian divisions against 98 German.

Joffre asked the British to contribute to his Artois offensive by a synchronised attack towards La Bassée on March 7th. But he also asked them to relieve his IX Corps near Ypres in order that it could reinforce his Artois offensive. And he made this attack contingent on the relief. In view of the recent growth of the British forces, the request was reasonable, so far as the calculation was based on man-power and mileage; a comparison of gun-power put it in a different light. But Joffre was not tactful, and French not reasonable, in the handling of the discussion.

Wilson relates that "Sir John showed much anger at the tone of Joffre's letter, brought by Belin last night; and Sir John, who had arranged to meet Foch and Belin at Cassel at 11 a.m., refused to go. The letter from Joffre was a stupid one, inaccurate in some important details and rather hectoring in tone. . . . Robertson told Belin that Sir John flatly refused to relieve anybody before April 1st, and even then did not promise. This was difficult. Foch asked again for one division of the IX Corps to be relieved, and I lean very much to this solution. Foch says that this division is essential to the success of his operations at Arras."

But French, apparently backed by Robertson, hinted at no such concession in his reply to Joffre, and intimated that no relief could take place before April 1st. When Foch heard of this he was much upset, arguing that such a statement was "non-sense" in view of the reinforcements French had already

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received. The reply also seems to have shaken Joffre's confidence in Wilson's powers, for he wrote and told Foch to negotiate with French direct. He also gave Huguet a sharp rebuke for "being too pro-English."

French's obstinacy was aggravated by resentment at Kitchener's withholding of the 29th Division. And even Foch's good-humoured tact had no power to dispel French's childlike fit of sulks. But the British troops were the chief sufferers.

For Joffre, equally if differently obstinate, intimated that his own offensive was postponed as the relief had not taken place, and sent French his ironical-sounding wishes for the success of the British attack. And French determined to persevere with this attack single-handed, to show the French what he could do.

The attack was launched at Neuve Chapelle on March 10th, by Haig's First Army. In detail the design was good, but lack of heavy guns and high explosive reduced the frontage of attack to a mere two thousand yards. By an intense bombardment of 35 minutes' duration, the German first line was stormed by surprise, while the artillery lengthened its range and dropped a curtain of fire beyond. But when, in the second phase, the frontage was extended, the artillery support proved inadequate, while delays had given the Germans five clear hours to reorganise their resistance. Then, too late and mistakenly, Haig ordered the attack to be pressed "regardless of loss." And loss was the only result.

Foch had not been content to follow his chief's unhelpful attitude, but he found the British in a morose mood. According to Wilson's diary for March 13th, "Foch came to say he was collecting eight batteries of heavy artillery and some infantry towards Vermelles to help Haig in his attack on La Bassée, and he wanted to know where to put these troops, and so on. Sir John would not tell him anything, said he wished to keep his moves and Haig's secret." It would seem, more probably, that he wished to hide his failure.

Joffre, however, did not feel commiseration, nor was he appeased. When Wilson went to Chantilly ten days later, Joffre began, at dinner, by loudly remarking: "Well, your Chief's extremely tiresome." Then, as proof of his power, he related how he had been given "absolute *carte blanche* till May" as a

result of telling the Cabinet: "If you take away one single man that I can use on my front *I will resign*." He followed this by an attack on French, "who calls me C.-in-C. and disobeys my orders," and a declaration that he was going to write to French "outspokenly." To Wilson, who tried to smooth things over, he was, however, "really charming." "Then he went on to talk of his own plans, how he calculated that by the end of April he would be in a condition to *attack* and *break* the line. . . . He had stopped the Champagne attack, having got all he could out of it, and was well satisfied, although he had lost 40,000 men in a month." This version for British consumption may be compared with the unusually candid report made to Poincaré by the liaison officer between G.Q.G. and the Government: "Colonel Pénélon, just arrived from G.Q.G., tells me frankly that the operations in Champagne have definitely failed, and Joffre has to resign himself to breaking them off."

Joffre, however, had lost none of his confidence. On March 21st he saw the Cabinet and guaranteed imminent success. Poincaré recorded: "He means to be busy again about the middle of April, when he will attack at two points and feels sure of getting through. He is perfectly explicit and precise. It is on the Western Front that a decision will be reached, and this will probably be before the summer, certainly before the autumn." The Germans "are already sliding down towards defeat." "Joffre is a little bitter when speaking of the English; he refuses to give them Dunkirk, though Kitchener says he will not, without it, be able to supply his troops. Our General is imbued in this matter with a rather dangerous spirit of controversy, against which I try to warn him, but nothing will move him. I remind him that if we do not come to amicable terms with the English they may send their armies elsewhere than to France."

Joffre, however, was not disturbed by this argument. He repeated, "I reckon on obtaining some decisive success before the month of May," and graciously declared that he did not mind if some troops were sent elsewhere subsequently. "The good humour, the frankness, the gentle obstinacy of the man combine to leave the best impression on the Ministers, who feel their confidence in him renewed."

On the 29th Kitchener and French came to Chantilly for a conference with Joffre. Wilson recorded: "Kitchener began



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about Holland and what should be done if Germany went to war. Kitchener favoured sending a lot of troops and making it the decisive theatre. Joffre, of course, would not hear of it. Joffre then gave a general review of the situation, declaring this to be the decisive theatre, and that, by May 1st, he and Sir John would attack and break the line." The discussion later turned on to the Dardanelles. "Sir John hoped no more troops would be sent. Kitchener said: *none*, there were already 67,000 available there." There is a curious want of logic in this assumption that now the Turks had been put on their guard, a force that was less than half the original estimate would suffice to break it.

Foch spent the latter part of March and early April in drawing up his plan for the Artois offensive and co-ordinating it with the British plan. On April 13th Poincaré and Millerand visited the chosen front of attack between Arras and Lens. Among others they saw Pétain, "a tall, strapping, beautifully groomed soldier, who explained with luminous clarity his arrangements and dispositions, but had no illusions as to any blazing success." "At Cassel, however, we found Foch as full of zest as ever, and still confident that with the early days of May we may score something like a real decision; he thinks that a way may be found through Arras, and on his big map laid his finger on Fleurus and Waterloo with the words: "There is where we ought to win."

The coming weeks would show that certain tactical obstacles lay in the path of this strategical dream of avenging history.

## CHAPTER XII

### "GAS"

ON April 22nd, 1915, came a dramatic forewarning of the enemy's power to upset preconceived ideas. At five o'clock in the evening a German bombardment, as sudden as it was severe, opened north of Ypres. From the German trenches two curious

wraiths of greenish-yellow fog crept forward, spread until they became one, and then, moving on, changed into a blue-white mist. It hung, as it had come, over the front of the two French Divisions—one of Algerians, one of Territorials—which held the left of the salient, adjoining the Canadian Division. Soon officers behind the front were startled to see a torrent of terrified humanity pouring backward. The Africans, nearest the British, were coughing and pointing to their throats as they fled. The French guns were still firing, but about 7 p.m. these suddenly and ominously became silent.

The fugitives left behind a gap over four miles wide, filled only by the dead and by those who lay suffocating in agony from chlorine-gas poisoning. By introducing a new weapon the Germans had achieved perhaps the most startling and paralysing surprise of the war, although on a relatively small scale. With the aid of gas they had removed the defenders of the north flank of the Ypres salient as deftly as if extracting the molars on one side of a jaw. They had only to push south four miles to reach Ypres and loosen all the teeth by pressure from the rear. That evening they walked forward two miles and then, strangely, stopped. Ten days later they were only a few hundred yards nearer Ypres.

The Germans had found a key that would open the trench barrier, but having unlocked the gate they failed to press it ajar. This forfeit of a great opportunity, one that could never fully return, was due to want of faith and foresight among the German command. No reserves had been concentrated to pour through the breach—because Falkenhayn had allotted none. His idea was merely to try the gas as an experimental aid to an attack which was itself merely a diversion to distract attention from his coming blow against the Russians. If the Ypres salient could be erased, so much the better, but he did not take any longer view.

Moreover, only a short-distance objective was assigned to the attacking troops, no special tactics had been thought out, and they had only been issued with the crudest form of respirator, which many of them even did not wear. Thus when they saw the effect on the French troops, fear of their own gas discouraged them from pressing on further than their allotted objective, and so prevented them discovering how completely resistance had disappeared.

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That the French were even more unprepared to resist the gas was due to the obtuseness of their commanders. For they had adequate warning. Towards the end of March prisoners taken on the south of the salient, then held by the French, gave full details of the placing of gas cylinders in the trenches. These details were published in the Bulletin of the Tenth Army in Artois, whither this French division went, but do not seem to have reached the divisions that were left in the salient. An even more complete and localised warning was given on April 13th by a German deserter who surrendered near Langemarck in the sector of the French XX Corps, Foch's old corps. One of the crude respirators issued to the German troops was actually found on him.

The divisional commander, Ferry, gravely impressed, warned his superiors as well as both his French and British neighbours. But the corps commander, Balfourier, deemed him a credulous fool. And when he repeated the warning to the liaison officer from G.Q.G. it was dismissed as a myth, while Ferry was rebuked for warning the British direct.

General Putz, who, with his two second-rate divisions, relieved the XX Corps, was no more inclined to believe the story than Balfourier, although a fresh warning came from Belgian sources on April 16th. Putz did, indeed, mention the story scoffingly to the British liaison officer, but apparently did not think it worth repeating to his own troops. So they waited in ignorance until suffocation overtook them.

Foch's responsibility in the matter is uncertain, but it is certain that he neither emphasised nor co-ordinated the warnings. It would seem that while his eyes were on the plane of high strategy, his ears were not kept on the ground.

On hearing the news of the German break-through, Foch sent word, about midnight, to Putz that he "should (1) make sure of holding on to the line he occupied; (2) organise a base of departure for a counter-attack to regain the ground lost; (3) counter-attack." For the last purpose he ordered a division of the XX Corps to be sent back from Arras, and also warned Maud'huy that he might want more.

Actually, the French were barely able to fulfil the first point. The remnants of Putz's divisions, which had lost their artillery, were aligned along the canal, where they had halted in the west-

ward flight. In the space of four and a half miles between the raw edge of the Canadian front and the canal—which formed the chord of the salient—stood only a few scattered packets of Canadians and French. Twenty-four hours later this broad path to Ypres and the British rear was almost filled, but only weakly filled, with Canadian and English reserves.

That morning Sir John French had gone to Cassel, where Foch assured him that he intended to regain the lost ground, and had ordered up large reinforcements. French promised to co-operate in any counter-offensive, but told Foch that unless the ground was regained soon he must be free to withdraw his men from the now dangerously contracted salient.

Twice during the day Foch himself drove to see Putz and urge him to action. But Putz was not in a condition to attack, and nothing happened. It is clear that Foch's assurance outstripped the facts. Unfortunately, French, in expectation of such action, ordered a series of hasty and ill-supported attacks which failed with heavy loss. Moreover, a renewed gas attack on the 24th against the jagged corner of the Canadian front cut a fresh slice off the salient. It had now been reduced to a narrow tongue of land, barely three miles across, although six miles to the tip. Thus, in attempting to hold it, the defenders were so crowded that they provided an easy harvest for the German guns. But French, beguiled by Foch's optimism, hesitated to sanction any withdrawal.

Reminiscing after the war, Foch spoke of how he had dealt with the emergency of April 22nd: "One knew nothing, one could know nothing, and if one waited till the next day it meant a break-through. I sent Desticker to Elverdinghe. He 'legged' it all night long. During this time Weygand and I at Cassel were warning the divisions at Arras. . . . They arrived at the rate of one a day. The gap was closed!"

These remarks show the fallibility of memory, if they also illustrate Foch's peculiarly strong tendency to assume that the facts of a situation coincided with his conception of it. For the prevention of a break-through was primarily due to the fact that the Germans were not aiming at one, and so did not exploit the one actually made. Only three French divisions were brought from Artois, and the first did not arrive on the battlefield until the 25th, so that the Germans had time to consolidate their hold.

Thirdly, and most important, Foch's aim was not merely to "close the gap," but to regain the lost ground. And this aim did not have its fulfilment in action.

The one bright spot on the 24th was that the German attack on the "hinge" of the salient was repulsed by the Belgians; henceforth the Germans were unable either to widen or deepen their small foothold across the canal. On the evening of that day Foch came to see French, told him that the 153rd Division was detraining at Cassel, handed him an autograph note which said that a second French division would arrive early on the morrow, asked that the British should assemble strong reserves at the same time, and concluded: "We will take a vigorous offensive against the front Steenstraat, Pilckem, Langemarck, and east of these places." But next day only one regiment of the leading division had come up, and Putz did nothing. The British duly launched their attack, and 2,400 men of one brigade were "mown down like corn, by machine-guns enfilade"—a higher cost than was paid that same day for the capture of the Gallipoli beaches.

Sir John French irately remarked that, as the French had got the Second Army into this difficulty, they ought to get it out, but he nevertheless ordered Smith-Dorrien, the Army Commander, to resume the attack next day. So, on the 26th, four brigades were launched, and lost 4,000 men without result. This time the French counter-attack developed, but on the right it recoiled with fresh loss of ground in face of a local discharge of gas, and on the left lost heavily for little gain.

Next morning, the 27th, Smith-Dorrien learnt that Putz had no further reinforcements. Realising the futility of such fragmentary attacks, he wrote to General Headquarters, saying: "I am doubtful if it is worth losing any more men to regain this French ground unless the French do something really big." He further suggested that it would be wise to prepare for a withdrawal to a less acutely bent line nearer Ypres. All that he got in reply was a telephone message from Robertson: "Chief does not regard situation nearly so unfavourable as your letter represents." In fact, however, Smith-Dorrien's letter was more optimistic than the grim conditions justified. This comforting message from a comfortably remote General Headquarters was followed by a worse rebuff—a telegram, sent through unciphered,

telling Smith-Dorrien to hand over command of all the troops engaged at Ypres to General Plumer. In this French seized the opportunity to pay off a debt of dislike which had accumulated at compound interest since Smith-Dorrien had saved French's situation against his own orders at La Cateau in August, 1914.

Before this telegram reached Smith-Dorrien there had been a repetition of the tragic farce on the front. Foch had magisterially told Putz that his forces were sufficient "to carry the affair to a successful conclusion." Putz duly ordered a fresh attack, but his troops did not make it, as they were pinned to the ground by a heavy barrage. They made an attempt in the evening which was quickly stopped. The British made two attempts, and so lost more men without more result. The day ended with a fresh gas panic among the French-African troops.

Next morning, Plumer's first instructions were to prepare the very withdrawal that Smith-Dorrien had suggested—a paradoxical sequel to the rebuke he had suffered. But then French went off to see Foch at Cassel and came back with a changed outlook. He had taken the line that the fighting at Ypres was a secondary affair compared with the coming offensive at Arras. But Foch argued vehemently against any withdrawal, said that the lost ground could be retaken by the troops already present, and declared that to win a second battle it was not necessary to lose a first. He begged French to postpone any withdrawal until he had seen the results of the French attacks to be made next day with the help of "a strong force of heavy artillery" that was being sent. This actually consisted of nine batteries of light-heavy guns; it is difficult to see any reason, beyond a Fochian discount of material factors, for imagining that such a handful could reverse the whole situation. But French gave way before Foch's discharge of "gas."

To avoid any risk of a change of mind, Foch followed up the interview with a letter. In it, he argued that "the new position selected for the British Army is at the foot of the ridge, and will be more difficult to hold than the present one on the crest"; that the enemy would be able to dominate the British line of supply with his guns; that a withdrawal would be "a confession of impotence: it will simply invite a very strong German effort." His characteristic final argument was—"the moral ascendancy will pass to the Germans." He drew the "conclusion" that a

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retirement "should be forbidden," and begged French "to be good enough to keep to his present intention, and to support the French offensive to retake the Langemarck region at all costs, beginning at noon on the 29th."

Foch's initial arguments were sound in themselves, if they exaggerated the undulations, and the value of command, in a region where scarcely any part of the "crest" was more than 160 feet above sea-level. But the root fault of his arguments was that they took so little account of the means and practicability of regaining the lost ground. True to his favourite quotation, he asked himself "what must be done," but did not ask how it was to be done.

The days that followed were a comedy behind the front, a tragedy for the troops in front. Day after day, French heard from his subordinates of the sufferings of the men and of the continued absence of the ever-promised French offensive. Thereupon he would incline towards a withdrawal, only to be swung the other way by Foch's buoyant assurances or flattering entreaties. In the carefully weighed words of the official history of this battle, "For ill now, although for weal in the last year of the war, General Foch was the very spirit of the offensive."

On the 29th Foch sent word that the offensive would be postponed twenty-four hours, as the newly arrived guns had not had time to register. French agreed to keep his troops in their position for another day. On the 30th Putz, under pressure from Foch, ordered the offensive, but his right did not move, his centre could not move, and his left would not move—after one abortive trial. Curé, commanding the left wing, "came to the conclusion that, owing to lack of sufficient heavy artillery, no advantage could be gained by continuing the general offensive." He had lost 4,000 men since the 26th in recovering yard by yard the little village of Lizerne on the west bank of the canal.

Yet on the evening of the 30th Foch again drove to see French, and "at his urgent request the British commander agreed a second time to a postponement of twenty-four hours although this meant leaving his troops exposed on three sides to artillery fire and suffering heavy wastage with little opportunity for reply."

Foch compelled Putz to order a renewed attack on May 1st, but when the hour came "the French infantry did not leave its trenches." Foch, *le dieu de la guerre*, might propose, but the





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men were not disposed—to make a useless sacrifice of their lives. They had shot their bolt.

And, later in the day, Foch came to French and said that his view had been overridden by Joffre, who, so far from sending reinforcements, was calling for troops to be sent from Ypres to reinforce the Arras offensive. French naturally jumped at the chance to order the long-planned and long-postponed withdrawal.

Its sequel appeared to justify Foch's prediction that a withdrawal would invite the enemy to make a fresh effort. For, after cautiously following, the Germans, on May 8th, launched against the new line an attack which lasted six days. But it was also the form of the new line which invited attack. French had overruled the fighting commanders' wish to withdraw to the natural straight line of defence formed by the ramparts of Ypres and the canal. Instead, the withdrawal was stopped on a line well short of Ypres. It still formed a salient, and, if flatter than the original, was more inconvenient for defence and control, the head being exposed to pounding from all sides, while Ypres itself formed a dangerously narrow throat of supply and communication.

The cause of this unhappy mean was in part the sentimental objection to yielding ground, especially the now historic ground of Ypres, and in part the requirement of being able to assist the still-promised French offensive. This was made at last on May 15th, but both its scale and its scope were small, and it merely removed the German foothold on the Allied side of the canal—truly a mountain that was long in labour and brought forth a mouse. And having forfeited sixty thousand men for the privilege of acting as midwife, the British were left to hold the cramped new salient, which has been aptly termed "one huge artillery target."

## CHAPTER XIII

### BLUNTING THE SWORD OF FRANCE

THE conduct of Foch at "Second Ypres" is worth detailed study, because it reveals the difference between conception and reality, between the commander's picture and the combatants' situation. It illustrates also Foch's tendency to assume that his issue of orders was equivalent to their execution.

It is possible to feel that at "First Ypres," despite his illusions, which there mattered less, his unquenchable spirit was of real benefit, even though its rays only reached the back of the front. But at Second Ypres his illusions are seen, in the cool, clear light of history, to have been of undiluted harm.

In fairness, we should remember that his mind was also occupied with his forthcoming Arras offensive. He would seem to have felt, correctly, that the French loss of ground at Ypres was a matter affecting the British more than the French. In these circumstances it was unfortunate that he did not leave the British to work out their own salvation and to apply their own solution at the right time. But it is also fair to add that Wilson constituted himself the instrument of Foch's will in influencing the decisions of French. Wilson had underlined all Foch's arguments for regaining the lost ground and had protested against the withdrawal. When French finally disregarded these protests, Wilson confided to his diary the doleful cry: "It is a real bad business."

However, he found consolation in a visit to Chantilly, where Ypres was forgotten in the sunrise of the Arras offensive. Joffre "was very hopeful of Foch's coming attack on Friday. Said he was bringing up even more troops and really thought he would break the line past mending, and that it might be, and ought to be, the beginning of the end. He talked of getting to Namur and the war being over in three months." Wilson went on to the Tenth Army, now placed under d'Urbal, where he was given a front seat in the stalls from which he could watch the curtain go up.

The offensive was fixed to begin on May 7th, but bad weather postponed it until the 9th. The immediate objective was Vimy Ridge, and Foch's reason for choosing it was that "the wide

extent of ground it commands and the practicality of the terrain it dominates, as well as the impossibility for an enemy to make any addition to his defensive organisation, would give the possession of the ridge an immense value and lead to the piercing of the enemy's line." His plan was to deliver the principal attack straight at the ridge, aided by subsidiary attacks on each flank; the northern one coming a day earlier in order to capture the eastern spur of Notre Dame de Lorette, which endangered the flank of the main attack. Still further north, the IX Corps and the British First Army would strike a day later to widen the gap. But when the opening was postponed it was decided to make all the attacks simultaneously on the 9th.

The British attack was nearly postponed altogether. French, full of anxiety over the situation at Ypres, had written to Kitchener on May 2nd complaining of Foch's nonchalance: "I have spoken very seriously to him about recent events, and have warned him that if his part of the line in the north is in my opinion not yet sufficiently strong (with a good deal to spare in view of possible gas annoyances), I shall abandon my support of him in the big business and reinforce my left. . . ." But in the end he yielded to Foch's pressing entreaties, and agreed to make the promised attack.

If superior numbers—the "big battalions"—were sufficient for success, it was amply assured. The Tenth Army was given 18 divisions besides 3 cavalry divisions for its attack on a narrow twelve-mile frontage—against 4 German divisions. More important, it had 1,252 guns, of which 293 were heavy. Foch asked for 90,000 rounds of heavy and 600,000 of field-gun ammunition—and, unlike his British comrades, received all he asked. Actually, he was to use four and three times as many respectively before he learnt that weight of metal did not make a key to success.

The plan definitely abandoned the idea of surprise. The attack, as a result of deductions from the winter experience, was to be preceded by a four-day bombardment, "slow, methodical, and prolonged, with the object of destroying the enemy's morale, disorganising his defensive measures and breaking up his obstacles and strong points." It was actually prolonged to six days. For the attack itself the new method of limited objectives was adopted, the first day's objective being the three-mile stage to the crest of Vimy Ridge.

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In this methodical organisation, Pétain, commanding the left centre corps, excelled. He personally visited every battery and watched each fire one round in order to see that it had registered on the exact target assigned in his artillery plan. Everywhere he questioned the regimental officers and N.C.O.'s to make sure that they were clear as to their individual rôle. If such attention to detail violated the canons of command, and would certainly have been anathema to a Foch, it paid in a type of war where the general was reduced to the rôle of a machine-tender.

Wilson's diary contains a vivid impression of the opening hours of May 9th. "The Frenchmen began to fire at 6 a.m., and fired till 10 a.m. . . . The gunning was incessant; from 9.30 to 9.40 an increase, from 9.40 to 9.50 less, from 9.50 to 10 o'clock appalling. Twelve hundred guns served by Frenchmen and lashing to their utmost. No living person has ever before heard or seen such a thing. The shells passing over my head made one steady hiss. At 10 o'clock to the second the guns stopped, and the whole long line of French infantry, as far as I could see to the north and south, rose up out of their trenches and went forward. The next minute the guns opened again with a barrage. A most wonderful sight. I watched the infantry take all the trenches in sight without too much loss and then at 11 a.m. came away." He went to see Foch, who was "pleased" with the reports he had received.

Actually, the situation was very different from this pleasing impression except at one part, where it flattered only to deceive. While the other corps were quickly brought to a halt, with murderous losses, Pétain's men swept through the German defences and on for two and a half miles without check. Some parties even reached the crest of Vimy Ridge near Souchez and looked down on the wide Plain of Douai—the "promised land." The rapidity of this advance undoubtedly created the element of surprise that had originally been eschewed. For a few hours there was a chance that the front might crumble, and twenty miles away at Lille, where distance magnified the echoes, the headquarters of Rupprecht's Army Group was even taking steps for a possible removal.

But the French command, because of its new self-dedication to a limited method, was even more taken by surprise. Pétain had kept only a brigade in corps reserve, and the nearest division

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of the Army Reserve was seven and a half miles distant. Before it could be brought up the Germans had closed the gap, and by the afternoon their counter-attacks began a pressure that won back part of the lost ground. They had the advantage in that, being driven back to the crest of the ridge, they could bring up reserves unobserved. By evening two more divisions had reinforced their original four, and henceforth their strength multiplied far faster than French attacks could reduce them. By May 15th thirteen German divisions were facing the Tenth Army.

Responsibility for the delay in exploiting the momentary opening lies with the army commander d'Urbal, rather than with Foch. But Foch was responsible, under Joffre, for continuing the offensive after opportunity had vanished. With desperate fighting, and growing loss, the French fought their way yard by yard through the shattered villages of Carency and Ablain St. Nazaire, and to the corner of the Plateau of Notre Dame de Lorette—all honeycombed with trenches. But the crest of the ridge hung mockingly above them out of reach. On May 15th a renewed general effort was made, with much loss and no progress. D'Urbal intended to try again next day, but Foch put a check on him, estimating that "eight or ten days' delay would be necessary" before resuming the general attack. Meantime local attacks would be made to secure "a base of departure" or starting line.

But in the meantime d'Urbal began to realise the difficulties under which his offensive was labouring. It was now Foch who spurred him on. At a conference on June 5th he gave the judgment that "it was necessary, whatever the cost, to profit by the superiority we now have over the enemy." Any doubts held by d'Urbal promptly disappeared, and, most astonishing of all, he notified the cavalry to be ready to pass through "at full gallop. The time for dismounted cavalry has passed." Thus after some preliminary advances, the final and futile general attack was launched on June 16th, and broken off, tardily, on the 18th, when the French casualties had reached a total of 102,500—rather more than double the defenders' loss. Even so, Foch was reluctant to stop, and only did so because of Joffre's express order.

Poincaré records: "The story which Colonel Pénélon tells me to-day, in strict confidence, leaves me no illusion whatever as to

the Arras operations, which have utterly failed. The thing is over, the casualty list is very heavy, and we are not going to get through; this is the third time that Joffre has made his attempt on too narrow a front. . . ." As consolation he was told that the German losses were "much greater," but, as he truly remarked, "this is very little better than guesswork."

The British attack further north, by Haig's First Army against Aubers Ridge, had differed from the French in retaining the Neuve Chapelle method of a short bombardment—only forty minutes instead of six days. The choice was dictated as much by shortage of ammunition as by desire of surprise. Haig had nine divisions—as well as five cavalry divisions, waiting uselessly in rear—against two German divisions. But the German defences had been much strengthened since Neuve Chapelle. Thus the attack died away quickly from a surfeit of German machine-guns and an insufficiency of British shells—especially heavy shells. The fault was not in the duration of the bombardment, but in its lack of effect—it served merely as a warning gong which told the enemy to man their fire-steps.

Wilson naturally drew a different deduction: "Neither the I Corps, Indian, nor IV Corps, could do anything; we lost some 10,000 men and never gained a yard. Now whose plans were right—Foch or Haig?" But the object could not be measured in yards, as Foch was to learn. Kitchener drew the right deduction when he wrote: "The French have an almost unlimited supply of ammunition, including H.E., and fourteen divisions in reserve, so if they cannot get through we may take it as proved that the lines cannot be forced." They could only be snapped by some form of surprise, as 1918 was to prove.

Strangely, on May 2nd, the Germans had foreshadowed their 1918 method. This was in the Gorlice-Tarnow break-through, which began the dramatic rolling back of the Russian "steam-roller," and continued week by week, month after month, until by the autumn 400,000 men of the Russian Army were sitting in prison-cages, and the remainder were standing far back on Russian soil. The strategic plan had been proposed by Conrad and adopted by Falkenhayn—without acknowledgment. The tactical plan had been devised by Colonel von Seeckt, post-war rebuilder of the German Army, to the popular glorification of Mackensen, his nominal commander. Fourteen divisions were

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concentrated on the Dunajec against a thirty-mile front held by six Russian divisions, and were launched after four hour's intense bombardment. It is true that the defences on this front were much weaker than in France, but against this must be set the fact that the German guns were spread more thinly. But the real merit, and effect, of the stroke lay in its swiftness of exploitation. This was due to the prompt infusion of reserves, to their disposition in depth, to the principle of reinforcing the successful rather than the held-up units, and to the elasticity of objectives—all of which were inculcated in the tactical plan. Such methods were nearly three years ahead of Western Front practice.

Joffre's conclusion as to the British failure coincided, naturally, with Wilson's. So, apparently, did that of Foch. The consequence was to cause fresh tension between the two Allied Commanders-in-Chief. On May 12th they met at Brias, Foch's battle headquarters, and Joffre complained that the stoppage of the British offensive was allowing the enemy to switch reserves to stop the French. Sir John French said he would resume the offensive on the 14th at a new point, but "Joffre said this was very late." Sir John French then offered to take over the front held by the French 58th Division on the British right. According to Wilson's diary, "Joffre pointed out that we should be doing very little if we only relieved the 58th Division, and hinted at Government action, which luckily Sir John did not quite catch, and I got the chance of interpreting wrong; but as both were getting hot, I got Sir John to go away, saying he would send an answer later."

Under this pressure from Joffre and Foch, Haig's attack was renewed in the Festubert sector, continuing from May 16th to 27th, while a further effort was made at Givenchy to assist the final spasm of Foch's offensive on June 16th. In these attacks Haig adopted the French method of prolonged bombardment, followed by limited assaults, a piecemeal method which was handicapped by the limited supply of heavy high-explosive ammunition. It enabled the British to bite off successive small pieces of the German line, but allowed the Germans time to make fresh lines in rear, and despite the small scale of the attacks the British loss reached a total of over 30,000 men.

Sir John French, made sore by French criticism and pressure, relieved his feelings in complaints that he was starved of ammuni-

tion, that the needs of the Dardanelles expedition were being met at his expense, and that Kitchener was responsible for his troubles. He used the services of his friend Colonel Repington, the military correspondent of *The Times*, to initiate a Press campaign in which Kitchener became the target. Kitchener could have retorted, with better justification, that the primary fault was French's folly in committing himself to an offensive campaign for which he had not the means, and in making a common cause with Joffre against the alternative move where the slender resources that were wasted in France might have sufficed for success.

It is interesting to note that when Poincaré saw Castelnau on the morning of May 9th he discovered that "Castelnau does not think any very important result will be derived, and contrary to the opinion of Joffre he thinks we may have to look for a decision in some other theatre of war, Italy or the Danube." Henry Wilson saw Castelnau after the offensive and found him "very much opposed to attacks like this at Arras, which cost 100,000 men, and did no good except shatter four corps. . . . He is for big guns, lots of ammunition, deep entrenchments, wait for the English to appear, stop all attacks till some chance of real decision, and so on." Thus even the pre-war high priest of the offensive had come to doubt the faith he had implanted in Joffre, his aforetime dull pupil in strategy. Divisional and corps commanders were the first to appreciate the impossibility—from contact with the enemy. Then the doubt spread backward and upward. Only Foch was left to reinforce by his confidence the Commander-in-Chief's will. Apart from Foch, belief in a break-through was confined to Joffre and his entourage at Chantilly, the post most remote from the front—and so from reality.

Yet plans for a fresh offensive were pursued. How did such a travesty of reason come about? The chain of causation was linked with the chain of subordination, and is an illustration of the unlimited power, whether for weal or woe, that rests in the hierarchic principle.

The aftermath of Arras witnessed an almost universal dejection and disgust, subdued to a whisper among the soldiers, but loudly voiced among politicians and the people. It was even stated in the Senate that two battalions had "gone over to the enemy singing the 'Internationale.'" Early in June Poincaré



found that "everyone is complaining about Joffre, and especially about his entourage." Clemenceau declared that "if things go on as they are, there will be a revolt of the generals against the High Command." He and others brought "violent indictments against the General Staff" in the Parliamentary Army Committee. Its president, "in despair of being able to calm these turbulent spirits, weeps to himself every evening when he goes home." A letter from a corps commander was read out which said that "the troops had lost their dash and had lapsed into a gloomy sort of resignation."

Poincaré himself received a daily growing crop of letters that urged negotiations for peace. When he went to Arras early in July, the commander of the IX Corps boldly entreated him: "Pray, Monsieur le Président, do what you can to put a stop to these local offensives; the instrument of victory is being broken in our hands." When he passed on to the other five corps that had shared in the offensive, "all the commanders, with little variation, voiced the same opinion." On the other hand, the army commander "by no means agreed with them; his rather lofty idea was that if the troops are having so grievous a time where they are, they should be pushed on up to the crest." "One again gets the impression of profound disagreement between the man who sets the task and the subordinates who have to execute it."

Pétain, the one man who had emerged with fresh laurels, frankly disputed the idea that a decisive victory had been narrowly missed. He added that the offensive had, rather, proved anew the error of "starting an offensive without sufficiently consulting those who have to carry it out."

In face of this volume of discontent, Joffre was driven to make concessions. He agreed to give eight days' leave to all ranks. He took a new Chief-of-Staff, Pellé, who was dismayed on taking over "to see such a gulf between G.Q.G. and the fighting line." To meet the charge that he shut himself off from his subordinates, and did not heed their opinion, Joffre promised to give his Army Group Commanders more freedom, handed over charge of the Centre Group to Castelnau, and arranged to hold conferences of the three with himself. It is worth note that Castelnau welcomed the idea of these conferences, while Foch deprecated it. Obviously, it tended to augment Castelnau's influence and to

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modify Foch's hitherto unique position as Joffre's right hand. When Castelnau expressed his opinion that the corps that had taken part in the Arras offensive needed a long rest, Foch "said excitedly that two or three weeks would be sufficient."

But it is equally significant to note the effect on Castelnau of advancement to this new position and influence in counsel. He no longer urged the necessity of seeking an alternative theatre of operations. And when the conference discussed Kitchener's arguments in favour of standing on the defensive until British man-power and munitions had reached full tide, Castelnau tacitly agreed with the others in their denunciation of "Kitchener's theory as heresy." Their common argument was: "Kitchener can pronounce at his ease as he has no invaded provinces to liberate." It revealed a curious subordination of combined strategy to single patriotism, and of practical to sentimental questions. Thus, very naturally, "there was a consensus of opinion that there must be one directing brain, and that that brain could only be in France." With amusing naïveté it was remarked that "unfortunately the Allies do not seem to see this in the same light." Joffre's remedy was that "the French Government might propose to the Allied Powers to centralise the supreme control of the war in the French G.Q.G., where concerted plans and instructions for operations might be worked out."

The most apt comment on G.Q.G.'s past qualification for such control was Castelnau's: "At present we have no plan, and we are rather like a cockchafer in a glass case; we keep on putting our head out right and left haphazard." This comment was made, however, not at Chantilly, but back in his own headquarters after his return! One suspects that Joffre, in appointing Castelnau, had shrewdly gauged the power of promotion as a gag.

Herein we have a clue to Joffre's success, logically astonishing, in riveting his plan for a fresh offensive on an army that had little or no belief in its success. Even Foch, while still giving loyal support to Joffre, had been brought by hard experience to reason and to doubt. When Poincaré visited his front early in July, Foch came to dinner: "He was vivacious, outspoken, and spicy in his talk as ever, but he seemed to me rather to have changed his outlook. He no longer talks about offensives, but

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now says that the war will be long, indeed very long, and that we must exercise patience and dig ourselves in solidly." And later in the month Poincaré learnt from Pénélon that "no single general, not excepting Foch, has any more faith in an offensive proving successful, and the Commander-in-Chief is very unhappy about this." Yet plans still went forward.

Joffre's immediate concern was to secure British resources in aid of his offensive. He wanted the bulk of the New Armies sent to France, and became, so Poincaré relates, "very disgruntled with the English" when he found that they shared the doubts of his generals. Kitchener pertinently remarked: "Joffre and Sir John told me in November that they were going to push the Germans back over the frontier; they gave me the same assurances in December, March, and May. What have they done? The attacks are very costly and end in nothing." But Joffre, who had scoffed at Kitchener's earlier fears of a Russian defeat, now made the actuality an argument for his renewed offensive, and by its leverage succeeded in shifting the weight of the New Armies on to French soil. He was not willing, however, to delay his offensive until it was there.

He kept his designs hidden from his own Government until August, and only revealed them fully when, with apprehension quickened by a vague hint, the Government asked for an explanation of his purpose. He then adduced the necessity of helping Russia, but was told that "questions of alliance" were for the Government to decide, and that he must only look at the problem "from the strategic point of view." Thereupon he shifted his ground and declared that "from purely military considerations it was necessary to keep his troops employed, as otherwise they would deteriorate physically and morally." The Government's acceptance of such a pretext, after the evidence they had received of the moral and physical exhaustion caused by the previous offensives, would be incredible—if it was not a fact.

Their weak surrender was the more astonishing because in June they had practically come to a decision in concert with the British Government to postpone any further offensive in France until 1916, while making an effort with strengthened forces to attain success at the Dardanelles. There, the landing on April 25th, although made against a forewarned enemy and with a mere five divisions against six, had but narrowly missed success.

When, after the capture of the beaches, the opportunity of exploitation was lost through a chain of blunders and accidents, stalemate set in. Belatedly in July the British Government decided to send reinforcements, which brought the strength of the expedition to twelve divisions. By the time they arrived the Turkish strength on the Gallipoli peninsula had also risen—to fifteen divisions. Still more belatedly the French Government decided to augment their share of the expedition.

Its decision was prompted as much by personal as by strategic considerations. Sarrail, commanding the Third Army at Verdun, was blamed for the abortive July attack in the Argonne. Joffre ordered an enquiry to be made by Dubail, not merely into the conduct of the attack, but also into Sarrail's general conduct. Following his report—a document that has mysteriously been lost—Sarrail was removed. He had been a very outspoken critic of Joffre's strategy.

But Sarrail was a strong Radical, and his political friends rallied to his side. With obvious justice they pointed out that no one had been penalised for the far greater failure at Arras. Joffre could not afford to raise a fresh storm against his régime. He conveyed a tactful hint that he would like Sarrail to be given the command at the Dardanelles, and the Government thankfully adopted this solution. To coat the pill they gave Sarrail a hint that the size of the command would be increased. It has been commonly said, and the insinuation is made in Wilson's diary as coming from Joffre's staff, that Sarrail intrigued for this increase as an increase of his own dignity. But, actually, it was urged by the previous commander, Gouraud, who had come home wounded, and the Government had agreed upon it. Their desire to translate this agreement into action was, however, undoubtedly stimulated by their desire to conciliate Sarrail and his political friends. They asked Joffre to spare four divisions as a reinforcement. Kitchener, on hearing their decision, proposed that two British divisions should also be sent from France. Wilson was horrified: "This is all appalling."

Thus Joffre found that his hint had become a boomerang. But he was equal to the emergency. He flatly told his Government that he could not and would not spare the troops at the moment, but as a sop said that if he did not "get through" in September, he would release them. We learn from Wilson's

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diary that he hit on the happy ruse of declaring that he found Sarraill's scheme too "sketchy" and proposing that Sarraill should go out and study the problem on the spot. "This gets rid of Sarraill rather neatly! So the whole thing falls down . . ." For it was shrewdly calculated that if the reinforcement to the Dardanelles could be postponed until after Joffre's offensive, "the October winds down there" would prevent it being sent at all. We learn also from Wilson that Joffre hurried to Italy to persuade Cadorna "on no account to send men to the Dardanelles." In this honourable way did the Commander-in-Chief frustrate his own Government. Finally, on September 11th, Joffre and French met Kitchener at Calais and, with their tongues in their cheeks, "agreed to send four French and two British divisions to the Dardanelles if and when the great attack failed."

Meantime, at the Dardanelles, Ian Hamilton had used his partial reinforcement of raw troops for a second and, as it proved, last attempt. He achieved surprise, but again narrowly missed success. Meantime, also, the enemy powers were gathering their forces to overwhelm Serbia; Bulgaria was arranging to enter the war on their side and stab Serbia in the back; Greece was turning away from the Allies; Russia's munition-starved forces were reeling back under fresh blows that they could not counter. As a result of these fresh disasters, the Tsar was adding another by taking into his own hands the command-in-chief. And, at the same time, Hoffmann, the guiding brain of the enemy's most dangerous moves, was saying that the success of the German efforts against Russia depended on keeping "the Dardanelles firmly closed." Hoffmann also made a self-consoling note in his diary: "When one gets a close view of influential people—their bad relations with each other, their conflicting ambitions, one must always bear in mind that it is certainly much worse on the other side among the French, English and Russians." His intuition was all too true.

Whilst Joffre and French were agreed, and only agreed, in resisting any removal of troops from France, they disagreed more and more over the action to be taken in France.

Joffre's plan for the autumn offensive was to strike again in Artois, and almost simultaneously in Champagne—if he could provide sufficient forces. The idea of a dual thrust was certainly

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better than a single one, especially when aimed at the sides of a salient. For by cutting through the flank sectors the central part might collapse. But the sectors he chose were much too far apart to have an immediate reaction on each other. Joffre, however, thought differently. A break-through in these two sectors was to be followed by a general offensive of all the armies, which "would compel the Germans to retreat beyond the Meuse and possibly end the war." As originally intended, the offensive in Artois was to be the main stroke. Yet, in the event, 5 German divisions sufficed to quench Foch's attack between Arras and Lens, made with 14 divisions, while  $1\frac{1}{2}$  German divisions broke the back of the attack further north by 6 British divisions. What a gulf between conception and execution!

As early as June 4th Joffre had sent his draft plan to French, asking that the British should assist in two ways: first, by taking over the front south of Arras held by Pétain's Second Army;<sup>1</sup> second, by taking part in Foch's offensive and attacking either on the north or the south flank of d'Urbal's army. French expressed his general agreement with this scheme, and said that he would strike on the north flank, between Lens and La Bassée.

Then a strong gust of common sense came from the man who would have to carry it out, Haig, and the military weather-vane swung the other way. Haig argued that the supply of heavy guns and shells was still inadequate, that its inadequacy was the governing factor in the problem, and that until the deficiency was remedied, it was little use to make plans for the offensive. Further, he had made a personal reconnaissance of the proposed area and found that "it was not a favourable one for attack." If an offensive was imperative, he suggested that the main British attack should take place north of La Bassée.

His doubts were endorsed by Robertson, but Robertson's influence with French had been undermined by Wilson, who was still a devout believer in the superiority of French military judgment. Robertson had even been excluded from French's personal mess. Meantime the chief's trusted friend and *confidant* was proposing to Foch that the British Army should be divided

<sup>1</sup> In August the newly formed British Third Army took over a fifteen-mile front from the Somme northward to Hébutenre. Joffre had desired the British to extend a further seven miles south of the river.

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into two Groups, "one where we are, and one away in Argonne or Vosges. Foch much pleased." Wilson then carried his proposal to Kitchener and pointed out the advantage: "less power for Sir John, less jealousy by the French, rivalry of the two groups throwing them into the arms of the French." Wilson had certainly done his best to ensure the last point.

Joffre would accept no arguments for a postponement of the site or a change of site. He even remarked, with a magisterial infallibility that is delightful in retrospect, but in retrospect only, that "your attack will find particularly favourable ground between Loos and La Bassée." Haig held to his view, based on eyesight. French was inclined to think that "Haig exaggerated the difficulties"; and even after a long-range look at the ground from Notre Dame de Lorette he still considered that it afforded "many advantages." But later in July he changed his mind, his doubts accentuated by news of stinted munitions from England and of unstinted work on the German defences—now strengthened by a second system in rear.

Hence a conference was arranged to take place on July 27th at Frévent, which had become Foch's headquarters. Wilson relates that "Sir John put out his reasons for not attacking on left of the French. Foch answered and in my judgment completely upset Sir John. Concentration, not dispersion, continuous and prolonged effort in one direction and for one purpose (say the heights overlooking the plain of Douai). All parts of the line equally strong." Here was surely a curious rejection by Foch of his own pre-war teaching. More characteristic by now was his disregard of the conditions of ground and fortification. On the other hand, it is just to add that he proposed to leave a gap in the attack opposite the maze-like mining town of Lens, and to recognise that experience supported his argument that a distant British attack would not have an immediate reaction on his own. "Sir John told me Foch had convinced him, but that both Haig and Robertson would oppose him heavily; still he would attack down near the French."

French may have been momentarily convinced on detail, but he had lost faith in the plan as a whole, and in the idea of taking the offensive. After a protest to Joffre, which only drew a strong endorsement of Foch's argument, French certainly promised that he "would direct the movements of the British

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Army in accordance with the wishes that you as Generalissimo expressed." Despite this assurance, he sought a way out through a project of co-operating by artillery fire alone. He intended to wait until the French attack had absorbed the enemy's attention before launching his infantry.

This way out was blocked first by Wilson and then by Kitchener. On discovering his chief's intention, Wilson promptly sent word to Pellé, whereupon Joffre wrote a strong letter to French, saying that he expected him to attack with all his forces, and wished him to settle details with Foch. French, still eager in evasion, had a reply drafted that "he would assist according to ammunition." Wilson at once rushed to see Foch, who, "when I told him the whole story, was quite open about the deplorable effect if we don't fight. . . . Sir John had better walk warily."

Joffre, perhaps remembering 1914, sent Kitchener a pressing invitation to visit the French Army. He came on August 16th and was met by Joffre, Foch, and Wilson, who kept him close company. He was paid all possible honours. After Joffre had appealed to him, Wilson sought to frighten him with tales that the French politicians were trying to displace Joffre as a preliminary to seeking peace, and urged on him "the absolute necessity of our doing nothing to upset the French soldiers, such as Sir John not putting his back in the forthcoming attack, etc. He told me he quite agreed and would speak to Sir John. A good day's work on Kitchener's part."

The sequel was that Kitchener told French that "we must act with all energy and do our utmost to help France in this offensive, even though by so doing we may suffer very heavy losses." As a further assurance he agreed to a formula, drawn up by Joffre, which gave Joffre greater control over French.

In this reversal of his previous attitude, Kitchener was apparently influenced by the news of Russia's latest defeats. But two blacks do not make a white, and as he had so often declared his belief that the Western Front was impassable, it is difficult to see how he could feel that a hopeless offensive there could bring fresh hope to the Russians.

The date of the offensive, originally fixed for September 7th, was postponed until the 25th, because the French preparations were not complete. On September 14th Joffre gave a final



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explanation of his plans at a conference at Chantilly, attended by the three Army Group Commanders and by French. Joffre declared that the time was "particularly favourable for a general offensive," and expressed his "confidence in a great and possibly complete victory." The simultaneous attacks were "a certain guarantee of success." But one important change from his original plan had been made. This was Joffre's decision, taken in July, to make the Champagne attack, and not the Artois, his main attack, for the reason that Vimy Ridge had not yet been captured, while in Champagne there were fewer obstacles or villages in the way of the attackers. This sudden regard for ground was in significant contrast to his view where the British attack was concerned. And the weakening of the French stroke in Artois had a damaging influence on the prospects of Haig's attack.

To Castelnau's attack in Champagne 34 divisions were allotted, 27 being for the main attack by Pétain's Second Army on an eighteen-mile frontage east of Reims and the remainder for a subsidiary stroke by Langle de Cary's Fourth Army west of Reims. In contrast, only 17 divisions were available for Foch's attack on a twelve-mile frontage. Haig, for his attack on a six-mile frontage, had 6 divisions, although 3 more were kept in general reserve under French. Joffre had insisted that these should be put at Haig's disposal before the offensive, lest they should be too late to exploit a success, but French disregarded this advice—that was virtually an order, and so the more objectionable in French's ears.

A greater disparity between the attacks was in the proportion of heavy guns. While Pétain had 850 and Foch had 420, Haig had only 114—barely half as many to the mile as Foch, and a mere two-fifths of Pétain's scale. To balance this disproportion Haig had gas, but this, being then discharged from cylinders, was dependent on a favourable wind. And it played him false.

The general plan of the offensive definitely subordinated the surprise of the enemy to the destruction of the enemy's defences.<sup>1</sup> The assault was preceded and prepared by a deliberate bombardment lasting four days and nights. But the attack itself was again to aim at a swift break-through. In theory, an irresistible

<sup>1</sup> A week before the offensive the French Ambassador in Rome reported that its delivery was a subject of general gossip.

tide of infantry, many waves deep, would sweep over and through the shell-shattered trenches.

After his prolonged earlier experience Foch seems to have lost some of his confidence in this method and aim. For in a memorandum of July 19th to Joffre he expressed doubts of a breakthrough, suggested an advance by limited stages, and spoke of the need for surprise. It is not easy to tell how deep was his conviction. For when d'Urbal proposed a methodical attack in three phases Foch overruled his wish and directed him, on September 4th, to carry out the three phases simultaneously—"to aim beyond a mere tactical success at a strategic breakthrough capable of producing decisive results, and to push the main body of his troops rapidly towards Douai."

It may be that he adopted this "impulsive" attitude merely in deference and loyalty to Joffre. On the other hand, his July memorandum may have been dictated largely in reaction from his disappointment that Joffre preferred Champagne to Artois for the main thrust; if so, it would be in accord with his character that his confidence and horizon should grow as the hour of attack drew nigh.

So did Haig's—in his case encouraged by a too successful gas demonstration. He made, however, the wise proviso that "under no circumstances should our attack be launched without the aid of gas." He was overruled because of the need of supporting Foch's attack, but as a compromise he arranged with French that he would only launch two of his divisions if, at the last moment, gas could not be used. Another question left indefinite, owing to the difficulty of reconciling Foch's and French's desires, was the hour of the assault. While French wished to attack as early as possible in the morning, Foch wished to carry out the final four hours of his bombardment in a good light. In the outcome this precaution recoiled on the British without benefiting the French.

At Haig's headquarters the last night was a time of tense anxiety and intense study of meteorological reports. These had "a slight bias towards favourable," and at 9 p.m. Haig ordered the full-scale attack with gas, although making arrangements for last-minute cancellation if necessary. During the hours of darkness the wind dropped almost to a calm. Haig went out as soon as it was light. After watching the slow drift of smoke-puffs

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from a cigarette, he gave the order to "carry on." But the improvement was delusive, and a few minutes later one of his staff telephoned to the I Corps to ask whether it was possible to stop the discharge and the attack. He was told, perhaps too impulsively, that it was too late.

The gas was turned on at 5.50 a.m., and forty minutes later the infantry were launched. On the British left the gas was a failure, some drifting back, and helped to smother the attack. On the right, one division, the 15th, made so deep a penetration that the German command, in momentary alarm, prepared to evacuate the whole area. The other divisions, however, were less successful, and soon forfeited opportunities through bad judgment. Worse still was the judgment shown in the use of the general reserve, which, despite the remonstrances of both Haig and Foch, was placed sixteen miles in rear by French and handed over to Haig too late. Thus the narrow crack was soon cemented by the enemy.

The ineffectiveness of the larger French attack further south also affected the British opportunity. The French infantry did not advance until 12.45 p.m., six and a quarter hours after their allies, and then made little progress where they did not make merely a demonstration. On the right and centre the attack was an almost complete failure; even where the attackers reached the enemy front line they were soon evicted in most places. The left wing had more success, gaining part of its first objective, but too slight to have a reaction on the British prospects. The bitter experiences of the spring and summer seem to have led the fighting commanders to discount Foch's assurance of a breakthrough, and to amend his vehement order by gentle evasion.

Foch, however, with undaunted optimism, if also in loyalty to his allies, determined to renew the attack. In the evening he gave d'Urbal orders to make his "principal effort on the left," while suspending the attack altogether on the right. Foch then went off to Lillers to see French, who was equally intent on pursuing the now fading gleam of success and of using the reserve that should have been used earlier. Thus at 11 p.m. Foch sent a report to Joffre which stated that "the happy situation of our left, combined with the British advantage, allows us to hope that we shall reach" the crest of Vimy Ridge.

But on his return to his own headquarters he seems to have



heard facts that induced a more realistic view. For early next morning he ordered d'Urbal not to attack until "he had re-established order in his divisions, and relieved those which had suffered most heavily." Not until noon did the French attacks begin again; the extreme left advanced half a mile, but elsewhere nothing was achieved. One corps, which had been completely checked, sent a false report that its troops had advanced a mile, whereupon with amazing faith a cavalry brigade was ordered up "for the pursuit."

Meantime a brake had been put on Foch from above. At 10 a.m. Joffre had told him on the telephone to "act discreetly," saying: "We must not think of forcing the crest of Vimy Ridge." A little later he summoned Foch to see him near Amiens, and there ordered him to "stop the attacks of the Tenth Army, taking care to avoid giving the British the impression that we are leaving them to attack alone, or the Germans that our offensive is slackening off. Economise ammunition."

Joffre's reason was not merely that he doubted the chances of the Artois attack, but that he was now pinning his hopes to the Champagne attack, which on the first day gave a delusive promise of a break-through. The delusion was largely caused by the Germans' cleverness in making their principal defence on their second position, whither they withdrew most of their artillery, thus initiating the method of elastic defence which was eventually turned against them by Pétain in 1918.

On September 25th, in consequence, the French broke through the first position and in two places came within reach of the second, taking 14,000 prisoners, although at heavy cost. Next day the second position was reached on a seven-mile frontage, but only one small and temporary lodgment was made. Castelnau and his two army commanders had each said originally that if the front was not broken through at the first blow the attempt would fail, but, characteristically, all save Pétain were now unwilling to accept their own conclusion. Castelnau overruled Pétain, and three more days of desperate fighting followed before Joffre at last called a halt. The most fantastic feature of the plan had been the moving up of eight cavalry divisions, with instructions to make "a relentless pursuit without waiting for the infantry," and with the frontier as their objective.

In Artois, Foch, on returning from his visit to Joffre, passed

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on the order to economise ammunition. On the 27th only his two left corps, nearest the British, made a perceptible attempt to attack, and they made imperceptible progress. That night French protested to Joffre that his reserves were becoming exhausted and his right was exposed; unless d'Urbal attacked vigorously and without delay he would be forced to abandon his offensive. In his diary French wrote: "The advance of the Tenth French Army is very slow and decidedly disappointing." Joffre told Foch to come to an understanding with French. Next morning Foch went to see him and was greeted with sharp complaints. French declared that if he was Commander-in-Chief on the whole front he would "put every available man in" just north of Loos and "rush" the German second position. "I should feel quite confident of success."

Foch concealed his hurt surprise at French's bitter tone, and pretended to agree "in principle" with French's fantastic idea. But he pointed out that the area was rather small to crowd in such large forces and to organise a combined Franco-British attack, suggesting that to do so would only increase the losses. Instead, he offered to relieve French's extreme right division, so providing him with a reserve of his own. French accepted.

That afternoon the French attack was resumed, and one division actually reached the crest of Vimy Ridge, a success that led the Germans to divert most of the newly arrived *Guard Corps* from the British front to that sector. But the other French divisions had achieved little, the weather was very bad, and d'Urbal reported that he was unable to renew the attack for several days. So on the morning of the 29th Foch came again to see French. He now offered to take over still more of French's front, as far as Hill 70 beyond Loos, and join with him in a "shoulder-to-shoulder" offensive, to begin on October 2nd. This was agreed upon. The offensive in Champagne was to be renewed similarly.

As this pause was to be followed by a renewal at the same points, it gave the enemy time to strengthen their defences and to bring up reserves. No one seems to have suggested that the point of attack might be shifted to a sector where the reserves were thin.

Bad weather, slow movements, the exhaustion of the troops, and the enemy's counter-attacks now intervened to cause re-

peated postponements. While Joffre, Foch, and French were urging haste and complaining of each other, the executive army commanders met many practical difficulties in carrying out their superiors' instructions, and in some cases simply disregarded them.

The Champagne attack was resumed first and collapsed first, having practically exhausted its shell supply before the infantry were launched. In Artois, a violent German attack on the 8th upset Haig's gas preparations, and led him to postpone his attack until the 13th. Foch thereupon decided not to wait any longer, reduced his part in the combined attack to a mere artillery demonstration, and launched his stroke against the crest of Vimy Ridge on the 11th. It failed with the loss of another couple of thousand men. Foch ascribed the failure to indifferent artillery preparation, and decided on yet another push, arguing that his troops were "within a bound" of the crest and could not afford to leave it in the enemy's hands during the winter.

Joffre, however, decided that he could not afford the cost of trying to reach it. Overruling Foch, he brought his offensive to a belated end. Haig's attempt on the 13th was equally futile. In the words of the official history, "it had not improved the general situation in any way, and had brought nothing but useless slaughter of infantry." The British casualties already had risen to a total of 50,380—or 60,392 including Haig's subsidiary attacks—whereas the German loss was barely 20,000. Foch's casualties were 48,000 and Castelnau's 143,000, while their German opponents had lost some 120,000. That the proportion of casualties suffered to casualties inflicted was rather lower for the French than for the British suggests the benefit of more heavy artillery, if it also suggests more discretion in the handling of the attacks.

While Joffre had thus again been occupied in proving his theory wrong, at a cost of a quarter of a million men, Bulgaria had mobilised against Serbia. On October 7th the Austro-German forces had begun the invasion of Serbia, followed a week later by the Bulgarians. Greece had refused to go to Serbia's aid. In default of the divisions which Joffre had withheld, two were taken from Gallipoli and sent to Salonika—too late to avert Serbia's collapse. Even now, his own offensive over, Joffre strove to wriggle out of his promise, and in the end

sent only two of the four. For he was actually proposing a fresh offensive in Alsace. But he had come round, all too late, to the view that help must be sent to the Balkans, and was willing to spare some—British divisions. It would seem that this concession, at second-hand, was hastened by Kitchener's blunt remark: "The more troops I give you, the more you say you want, and the more you keep your own hand tightly on them. If you are so jealous on this point, I shall be obliged to be more cautious as to sending you our people, but shall keep them to allocate where I think necessary."

Joffre became willing to spare some British divisions, with the idea that they would subsequently be replaced from England. But French, whose command would be the immediate sufferer, now became the chief obstructionist. In his diary he dismissed the Balkan danger with the remark: "No good can possibly come by weakening the troops here, which must always be the principal theatre, and where alone we can *meet* and kill Germans!" But his protest was overridden by the exertions of Joffre, who now, at the end of October, when Serbia was almost crushed, went over to London and there, by the weight of his influence, persuaded the Government to lock up forces in Salonika—truly a case of locking the stable door when the horse has gone.

Wilson's acrobatic reactions to the French change of attitude lent a turn of farce to the tragedy. He had just been declaring that the Salonika expedition was "much against Joffre's wishes"; that "the whole of the Salonika business is political, and as usual the fools at home—Asquith, Grey, K.—have been taken in." Then he received letters from his War Office friends which "accuse the French and Joffre of having let us in over Salonika." Unable to believe it, he paid a flying visit to Joffre's headquarters, where he found that the incredible was true. But he had no difficulty in performing a somersault. "Joffre is in favour of sending the 150,000; we are backing out. . . . I told him I had grave reasons for thinking we were not going to send a man to Salonika, and that if we sent anybody anywhere it would be to Gallipoli. He said our strategists were fools. I told him I cordially agreed with him." After a call on Foch "to tell him all our gossip, which he loves," Wilson arrived back at St. Omer and "wrote a long letter describing Joffre's position, and how I



agreed with him as regards the necessity of saving Serbia. . . ." But the agreement was a little late, the expedition was later, and the help arrived too late to save Serbia.

Joffre's curious reversal of attitude and pressure seems to have been impelled by a feeling of personal insecurity, if a still deeper motive was also maturing. On October 9th Pénélon had told Poincaré: "Joffre will not listen to anybody and turns down any plan which the 3rd [Operations] Bureau has submitted to him, and the officers there are very sore and will go if Joffre remains without somebody like Castelnau being with him. I am saying this to you on behalf of all my colleagues." Poincaré made the note: "Pénélon is usually so discreet and so correct that things must be very wrong at G.Q.G. for him to speak like this."

Yet the ironical result of the double disaster—in France and the Balkans—was not the removal of Joffre, but the fall of the Government. Perhaps it deserved its fate for its weak surrender to his repeated and repeatedly unfounded assurances. With equal irony, if with ample justification, the one commander to suffer as a result of the offensive was Sir John French, unwilling tool of Joffre's ambitions. He was removed from the command of the British forces and replaced by Haig.

Under cover of Joffre's benign cloak Foch also avoided penalty, if he did not escape criticism. The shadow of disgrace was not to fall across his radiant confidence until another year had passed, a year in which he showed that he had drawn some profit from his 1915 experience, and caused less vain expenditure of life. For Foch, the personal tragedy of 1915 has been aptly expressed by Mayer: "Foch had been called on to conduct a siege warfare, the type of warfare most contrary to his nature, to his impulsive spirit, to his qualities of intrepid confidence, to his love of risk."

His outlook had certainly become more sober by the end of the year, and in this time of disillusionment he seems to have questioned the truth of his theory of war. Poincaré, meeting him on October 25th, noted: "He seemed to-day rather restless, like a thoroughbred horse pulling at his bridle. He no longer believes in crushing the enemy's defences and thinks we shall need all our resources alike of industry and diplomacy; only, when the hour comes, he hopes that by heavy pressure on a well-selected point we may make the enemy's front begin to give way, and

then, by a series of well and methodically prepared attacks, overcome the mighty obstacle and pass through."

The reason of this visit was to present to Foch the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour. According to the words of the Official Gazette, "he had shown in all circumstances since the opening of the campaign, in the defensive as in the offensive, unparalleled aptitude." In the peculiar inappropriateness of the phrase we may discern the difference between truth and official truth. More justified was the supplementary reason that he had "contributed greatly to the perfect co-ordination of the efforts of the Allied armies, and has thus rendered the most eminent services to his country." Here again, however, the adjective "perfect" was equally inaccurate.

On November 10th he submitted his report on the past operations and gave his considered views as to the future. "The campaign of 1915 did not accomplish any results, because we did not have enough artillery ammunition." The opening was certainly frank, but the excuse was only a part of the truth. Moreover, in so far as it was true it was a self-condemnation of his judgment and of his zeal for the offensive. After advocating that trench-mortars should be developed, and saying that gas shells and projectors were at present ineffective, he continued: "In our attacks across ground fortified in depth we must above all spare our infantry, in order that it may last through the time inevitably necessary for the battle to be completed." "After artillery, call chemistry to our aid." This emphasis on economy of life marked an advance in his views, and sounded a note that had been missing from his pre-war teaching.

Next he turned to the question of method: "The succession of obstacles which an offensive encounters in its advance leads inevitably to a succession of attacks . . . a series of efforts following each other as closely as possible. We must give up the idea of an assault undertaken with more or less deep and dense masses, the reserves following closely on the heels of the first line, and with the idea of carrying at a single bound a whole series of obstacles. This method has never succeeded." Yet the idea he here abandoned was to be taken up and carried through by the Germans in 1918—because they prepared the way through surprise.

Foch, instead, had become a more convinced advocate of a

material preparation—by fire. *"It is a fact that the infantry attack always halts and fails at that point where the preparation has not been sufficient.* Once more we see that the power of organisation is stronger than the bravery of the troops." On Foch's lips "once more" has a strange echo.

In a further memorandum on December 6th Foch amplified his deductions. "The offensive draws its strength:

"(1) From its power of destruction (artillery, gas). . . .

"(2) From its ability to renew promptly its successive action against each succeeding line. Destruction, repetition; these are its essential characteristics. The one sought for and therefore to be reinforced; the other forced upon us and therefore to be abridged."

Neatly said, and true, yet with a significant omission to mention surprise or the psychological factors.

On January 21st, 1916, he defined the new method of attack even better, and with more emphasis on economy. "In short, it is a series of successive acts, each necessitating a great quantity of artillery and very little infantry. This form of attack applied in the battle of the future opens up the possibility of wide and repeated offensives, provided we have at our disposal many guns and much ammunition." The reference to "wide," if it is to be read in the sense not merely of width but of widespread points of attack, casts a promising beam of light ahead—towards the autumn of 1918.

## CHAPTER XIV

### 1916—THE CREEPING SHADOW

THE close of 1915 brought a slight but significant change in Foch's position. This change had an indirect cause. Dissatisfaction with Joffre's conduct of the campaign had led, paradoxically, to an enlargement of Joffre's powers. He was given supreme command of all the French forces, not merely those in France. If this step was in part due to a general desire

for a unified direction of the French and Allied strategy, it was also the outcome of a special desire to put a check on Joffre. His critics among the staff of the army encouraged the idea of widening his share of responsibility on the calculation that he would be forced to accept the appointment of "a real Chief of Staff," to assist him in name and control him in fact. The advocates of the Balkan plan saw in the idea a lever to loosen resistance to their plan, calculating that when the Balkan theatre was nominally under Joffre's command he would no longer oppose the dispatch of forces thither. Joffre himself welcomed the idea as an aggrandisement of his authority, and as a means of confining the Balkan plan to a subsidiary and limited rôle.

For Galliéni, the most authoritative sponsor of the plan, had just been summoned to be Minister of War in the new Government. What a turning of the tables! What a chance for revenge! Joffre was acutely sensitive to such a danger. Only a few weeks before, Joffre had issued a belated *citation* of Galliéni's contribution to the Marne, a citation so *diminuendo* that it could only have been intended to dam by faint praise the rising tide of public recognition of Galliéni's share in the victory. Its slighting phrases had caused widespread indignation and given the recipient deep offence. And then, by a dramatic turn of fortune's wheel, the man under whose orders Joffre had been in Madagascar could once more give him orders—from Paris.

When so many voices were clamant for Joffre's dismissal, Galliéni had only to speak the word of endorsement for Joffre's fall to become fact and his own revenge complete. Instead, he refused to turn his new power against the man whose jealousy had previously withdrawn all power from him. Deeming that Joffre's legendary prestige was an inter-Allied asset not lightly to be discarded, he approved the extension of Joffre's authority to include all theatres of war, while supporting the appointment of Castelnau to be Chief of the General Staff in order to enable a nimbler brain to influence the operations. Castelnau had recently opposed the suggested winter offensive in Alsace, urging that the French armies should sit tight until their resources had grown, and saying, "We must make war commercially; there is a big grocer's bill to be reckoned with." His attitude appealed to Galliéni, who regarded his own task as being primarily that of developing the output of munitions and the material strength

necessary for a sustained offensive. Auxiliary to this was Galliéni's aim of reforming the high command, so that the use of the new resources should be better directed.

So Castelnau went to Chantilly in his new rôle, and from Chantilly were banished a few of the more suspect instigators of the 1915 strategy. Castelnau's appointment inevitably affected the official position of Foch *vis-à-vis* the Commander-in-Chief, confining him more strictly to his rôle as commander of the northern group of armies. More ominously still, Joffre promised that he would probably place Castelnau in direct charge of the next offensive. By a coincidence of fortune, Henry Wilson at the same time lost his power to influence the relations of the British to the French command, being relegated on Haig's accession to the narrow sphere of a corps commander.

The limitation of Wilson's influence was more definite than that of Foch, who still retained the confidence of Joffre more fully than any other among the French generals. By elevation Castelnau had become the potential rival. Joffre's ever zealous and jealous entourage took pains to nullify Castelnau's influence by ignoring his presence at Chantilly.

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The importance of Foch's rôle in 1916 would be diminished but principally owing to the intervention of the Germans.

At the close of 1915 the first serious effort for unity of action among the Allies was made, and on December 6th an inter-Allied military conference assembled at Chantilly under Joffre's presidency. After making the astonishing claim that the autumn offensive had brought "brilliant tactical results," Joffre unfolded his plan for 1916 to the Allied commanders or their representatives. It was a plan traced in somewhat vague outline. France, Britain, Russia, and Italy were to "carry on combined offensives simultaneously with the maximum possible forces on their respective fronts." So far as the French were concerned it was essential that "the Higher Command must have no anxiety as regards ammunition," and for this reason the offensive could not be undertaken for three months or more. It was recognised also that the new British forces would require time for training, and Russia time for re-equipment.

The chief outcome of the conference was to ensure a greater

concentration of effort and force in France at the expense of other theatres. The conference was "unanimous in demanding" the "immediate and complete evacuation of Gallipoli." This evacuation, duly carried out within a few weeks, fulfilled the desire of the British General Staff, which adopted as a "ruling principle. . . . to place every possible division in France . . ." This "principle" became the ruling idea in the mind of Robertson, who, on Haig's appointment to the command in France, was sent to be Chief of the General Staff at home. A man pedantic in theory but shrewdly practical in detail, who had risen from the ranks to high position by dogged perseverance and a talent for destructive criticism of detail, his service in France had naturally riveted on his mind the Continental formulas of war that had become the vogue at the Staff College between 1870 and 1914.

In strait fidelity to these formulas the British General Staff wished to evacuate Salonika as well as Gallipoli, but the French and Russian Governments insisted that the Allied contingent, now raised to eight divisions, should remain there in order to prevent Greece and Rumania being induced or compelled to throw in their lot with the Germanic alliance. In throwing his decisive weight into the scales against the more academic British military opinion, Joffre did not contemplate Salonika as more than a means to reduce the German bulk by external friction. He gave no support to the plan proposed by Alexiev, who had become the director of Russia's strategy when the Tsar, displacing the Grand Duke Nicholas, had assumed direct command of the Russian Armies. Alexiev's plan was that an Anglo-French army of ten corps should move up the Danube and converge on Buda-Pest in concert with a similar-sized Russian force, while the Italians struck for Vienna as soon as this leverage on the Austrian rear took effect. This project was to be realised, but without Russia's aid, in the autumn of 1918.

On the eve of the New Year the plan of campaign in France became more defined. Joffre sent the new British commander proposals for a great combined offensive on a sixty-mile front astride the Somme, from Lassigny to Arras. He told Haig that Foch had been ordered to make a study of a potential offensive south of the Somme, and asked him for his views as to a co-operating British attack north of the river.

Taking advantage of the impulse to unity given by the Chantilly conference, Joffre sought to exercise more direct control over Haig than he had attempted with French, treating Haig as one of his army group commanders rather than as a co-equal commander. In his attitude Joffre was helped by the fact that the British Government's instructions to Haig differed from those originally given to French. Where French was told to "coincide most sympathetically," but to avoid undue risk, Haig was told that "the closest co-operation between the French and British as a united army must be the governing policy." And in a curiously worded phrase it was added that he would "in no case come under the orders" of Joffre "further than the necessary co-operation with our Allies above referred to."

If this meant anything, it meant that he was under Joffre's orders strategically, although with the power to demur. In practice, his force of character would diminish this subordination; but his trend of military thought would, perhaps, more than make up the difference. The greater nominal subordination of Haig in comparison with his predecessor, and the greater actual subordination of British to French strategy that now developed, make a significant contrast with the greater scale of the British Army in France. At the beginning of 1916, despite the loss of half a million men, its strength had risen to a million and comprised 38 divisions, while the French had 95 divisions. With the addition of the Belgians this provided 139 Allied divisions against 117½ German divisions. And whereas at the end of 1914 the British had only held 21 miles of front out of 466, they now held 67, soon increased to 87 miles. Yet this frontage was still small in proportion to their strength, and mathematically justified French demands that they take over more. While it is to be remembered that the British occupied a strategically vital part of the front, it would seem that Haig required an insurance against risk far in excess of that with which his allies had to be content. But, in resisting French demands, he was primarily inspired by an offensive purpose—that of making his eventual attack as powerful as possible. And to this end Robertson aided him with such single-eyed concentration that by midsummer he was reinforced by a further 19 divisions at the expense of other theatres—and of Britain's traditional strategy. In the narrow coastal tract of Flanders and Northern France were sunk all but a fraction of

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the British forces. The historic "cockpit of Europe" became the sump-pit of the British Empire.

Foch prepared and Joffre approved a plan whereby the French and British would attack "shoulder to shoulder" on the Somme, the French with 40 divisions on a twenty-five mile front from Lassigny north to the Somme, and the British with 25 divisions if possible from the Somme northward as far as Hébuterne. But Joffre considered that the Allied armies would not be ready for this big effort until summer, and that it should be preceded by strong preliminary attacks to wear down the German forces and absorb their reserves. For this "preparatory" rôle he cast his allies. Even before the inter-Allied conference in early December, Poincaré was informed that Joffre had "in mind a war of attrition which must be chiefly carried out by our allies, England, Russia, and even Italy. . . ."

In the course of a visit to Haig on January 20th, Joffre suggested that the British should make a large-scale attack on at least a twelve-mile front, in April. And he followed up the proposal by a letter in which he bluntly said: "I regard it as indispensable that before the general offensive, the British Army should seek to wear down the German forces by wide and powerful offensives, as the French did during the year 1915."

This was hardly an encouraging example to quote, and all the less so because Joffre and Foch gave Haig a clear hint that this time it was for the British to carry out this preparatory task, and that the French would not take the offensive until it was done.

Haig's reaction was equally strong. Even if he had been ready, he had a well-founded disbelief in the value of preparatory attacks made so long ahead. In his reply he recognised that preparatory attacks made only ten days or a fortnight before the main offensive, and at points well distant from its selected site, might draw off the enemy's reserves. Even so, the British Army had not yet sufficient heavy artillery for the double purpose, although it might be possible to transfer batteries in time from one point to the other.

Haig, like Nivelle a year later, advocated one great stroke with all the forces available, with raids meantime to keep the enemy on tenter-hooks, while Joffre continued to press for preparatory attacks. Finally, they settled their differences at a conference on February 14th, whereat Joffre gave up his demand



on condition that Haig made a partial attack in the Armentières sector just previous to the main offensive on the Somme, which was now fixed for July 1st. Haig, in return, agreed to take over the Arras sector from the French Tenth Army, which, since the previous August, had been sandwiched between the right and centre British Armies.

This arrangement was not altogether to the taste of Foch, although in obedience to Joffre's instructions he had prepared the plan of attack. For Foch was convinced that Vimy Ridge offered the key to a decisive avenue of advance, and contrariwise, thought that the sector south of the Somme as well as that in Champagne were strategic dead-ends. In his view they offered no important objective, and had the disadvantage as lines of advance that the one was bounded by the "ditch" of the Somme and the other by that of the Aisne. It is interesting to note that his view had here an essentially geographical focus.

But one modification which he introduced into the plan of attack, and to which he gained Haig's assent, was that instead of the Somme forming the line of division between the Allied armies, one French corps should be sent north of the river. This change fulfilled the military theory that the forces operating on either side of such a dividing barrier should be under one command, to ensure co-ordination. But it was to prove a case where theory had practical drawbacks, for in the outcome the presence of a French corps north of the river complicated the arrangements for synchronised action, and cramped the free action of the British right wing. Perhaps at the back of Foch's mind there was the idea that this corps might serve as a lever to turn the lateral barrier to this advance south of the Somme that was formed by the L-shaped course of the river (the Somme flows northward to Péronne before it turns westward to the sea). It is noteworthy that the corps chosen to act north of the river was his own former *corps d'élite*, the XX.

Exactly a week after the conference where Joffre and Haig had settled their plan of attack, its base and their calculations were upset by the German attack on Verdun. For on February 21st Falkenhayn fulfilled his long-cherished dream of seeking a decision in France, the dream which had led him to curtail his ever-successful strokes against Russia, and that he now sought to realise by a gradual offensive process which should "bleed

France white." At Joffre's conference such a possibility had not been discussed, nor Verdun even mentioned.

The omission was not surprising, because Joffre had failed to foresee or prepare to meet such a menace. Since, in August, 1915, he had persuaded the Government to place the fortress of Verdun under his control, Joffre had drained it of men and guns, and had taken no care to compensate the drain by adequate trench defences. Back in December, warnings of the weakness had percolated through to Paris, but in response to Galliéni's enquiry Joffre had contemptuously dismissed such "apprehensions," and complained that the spreading of such baseless rumours was "calculated to disturb profoundly the spirit of discipline in the Army." Eventually his Intelligence branch had discerned signs of the German preparations, but his Operations branch had been too full of their own offensive schemes to pay heed. As late as February 18th he implied in a letter to Haig that if the Germans took the offensive at all, it would be once more against the Russians. Next day Castelnau informed Haig that the enemy were about to attack Verdun ! Thus it was only at the last hour that a reinforcement of two army corps was dispatched, and arrived in time to stiffen a frail and cracking line. Only the indomitable fortitude of the fighting men, whose warnings had been unheeded, had saved the line from breaking already. And even they could not have saved it if the heavens had not come to their aid. For heavy rain had postponed the launching of an attack that should, according to the German plan, have been launched on February 13th. In that case Verdun would certainly have been mentioned at Joffre's conference !

As it was, the timely arrival of the reinforcements and the gradually swelling process of the enemy's attack obscured the gravity of the danger. Even when the news of the crumbling front came through, Joffre was not moved, much less disturbed. And his staff assured him that the Germans, presumably imitating his own intention, were only attacking Verdun as a blind to cover the real attack, which, they admitted, might now fall on some part of the French front. But on the night of the 24th reports so alarming came in that Castelnau, greatly daring, insisted that one of the aides-de-camp should knock on Joffre's bedroom door, regularly locked at ten o'clock to shut out all disturbers of his sleep. Before Joffre returned to his bed he had

given Castelnau authority to travel through the night to Verdun with "full powers" to deal with the situation. It was also arranged that Pétain should take charge of the defence. Summoned to Chantilly before undertaking the task, he found Joffre still far from realising the full emergency, the interview concluding with the words: "Well, my friend, now you are easy in your mind." On reaching Verdun he found ample reason for uneasiness. The "great brooding mass" of Fort Douaumont, the most commanding point on the semicircle of hills that covered Verdun, had just fallen into the assailants' hands.

Henceforth crisis would follow crisis during four dreadful months, and although each would be survived, the greater part of the French Army would be drawn through the German artillery mincing-machine. Thereby the French were compelled against their will to carry out the wearing-down process—in an indirect form—which Joffre had intended should be the lot of his allies. It was truly a grim jest of fate. And the more grim because the French were worn down faster than their assailants.

Joffre's first reaction was to ask Haig to hasten the relief of the Tenth Army in order to provide himself with reserves for a counter-offensive. He also asked the Russian and Italian Armies to assist him by indirect action.

In response, the Italians launched the fifth of their eleven vain attacks on the Isonzo front, while the Russians hurled their untrained masses into the cauldron of Lake Narocz. Three months later they would again come to the rescue of their allies, this time of Italy, hard-pressed by the Austrian attack in the Trentino, as well as of France. And Brusilov's attack on June 4th, initiated as a mere distraction, would have such amazing initial success that into it, prematurely yet too late, would be diverted the reserves intended for the main Russian offensive. His ultimate loss of a million men sealed the ruin of Russia's military power. Nevertheless, Brusilov's offensive had a Samson-like grandeur, for it not only stopped the Austrian attack on Italy, compelled the withdrawal of troops from France, and led to the accession of Rumania, but buried Falkenhayn himself in the ruins of his 1916 plan.

The second reaction of Verdun on Joffre's 1916 plan was to make him put forward the provisional date of the main Franco-British offensive and abandon the idea of preparatory attacks.

And with every fresh blow suffered and parried at Verdun the framework of his offensive design was shaken.

Foch was hit on the rebound. As more divisions were drawn to and worn down at Verdun, so did his prospective forces shrink. On April 15th he was warned that he would only have 30 instead of 40 divisions. A month later they were reduced to 26. Eventually they would shrink to 16, and the frontage of attack from twenty-five miles to eight. The main burden of the offensive was thus transferred to British shoulders, and Foch himself had perforce to play second fiddle to Haig in the Somme orchestra.

In the sphere of action, if not of advice, Foch reconciled himself to such a part. For this year his outlook was adjusted to the limitation of his means, and his method of attack based on limitation of objectives. In a "Note on the Offensive Battle," drawn up in March, he gave the ruling that "the depth of ground that can be swept by artillery determines the space which can be assigned for the infantry to conquer." Hence, the offensive would consist of a methodical series of bites which would both eat away and eat a way through the successive layers of the enemy's defensive system. "When the enemy, his reserves exhausted, can no longer oppose us with organised and continuous defences, then only can we abandon the methodical mode of action."

His conversion to the belief that only the "limited" method was practicable was shared by Rawlinson, the commander of the adjoining British Fourth Army, who would be in executive charge of the British wing of the attack. But their respective superiors had different and more ambitious views.

Joffre certainly spoke of a "series of efforts" and of "a long and hard battle," but a "break-through" was also his constant refrain. The explanation would seem to be that, while he unwillingly accepted the limited method as an initial necessity, he still hoped, as fervently as in 1915, that it would miraculously change into an unlimited collapse of the enemy's front.

Haig, as an ardent cavalryman, naturally found slow siege warfare methods even more disagreeable. And he went further than Joffre in bidding for a break-through. On April 3rd Rawlinson submitted to him a plan for a methodical attack which should be preceded by the several days' bombardment that Foch

favoured, and should aim to conquer merely the enemy's front position in the first phase. Haig criticised this plan, with justice, as being too straightforward and devoid of purpose. Instead of trying to satisfy its psychological wants, however, he merely gave rein to his appetite for larger results. Rawlinson's diary for April 30th records: "The attack is to go for the big thing. I still think we would do better to proceed by shorter steps; but I have told D. H. [Douglas Haig] I will carry out his plan with as much enthusiasm as if it were my own."

While Haig somewhat reduced his desires to meet Rawlinson's objections, and gave way to Rawlinson's desire for a long bombardment, his final instructions were that, on the left, part of the German second position should be captured on the first day. The rolling uplands of Picardy rise to a high ridge which forms the watershed between the Somme and Ancre. This ran obliquely across the front. As usual, the Germans were ensconced on top; their second position ran along the ridge between Guillemont and Pozières. Thus the sector where the British attack would fall formed a rough N—the left-hand stroke being the original front, the oblique stroke being the watershed with the enemy's second position along it, and the right-hand stroke being the Péronne-Bapaume road, whither Joffre and Haig sought to break through as a prelude to an advance into open country. Haig's aim for the first day was to reach a line that would place him across the oblique stroke, thus: N. He held out no prospect of providing increased strength for the increased task, although his artillery adviser, endorsing Rawlinson's view, warned him that he was stretching his artillery too far. He even asked Rawlinson to extend his front of attack to Gommecourt; but in face of Rawlinson's protest he handed over this extra task to Allenby's Third Army.

On reaching Bapaume, Haig's intention was to widen the breach by swinging left and rolling up the German front northward as far as Arras. His cavalry were given, optimistically, the rôle of pushing on to Bapaume ahead of the infantry and then making a scythe-like sweep on the outer flank of the northward swing. Haig, in fact, was dreaming of a break-through such as the enemy had achieved a year before on the Dunajec against the Russians. But the 1915 defences on the Russian front could not be compared with the network of wire and trenches on the

Somme. And on the Somme the vast preparations for the attack were as carelessly displayed as on the Dunajec they had been skilfully cloaked. Moreover, as we now know, the German tactics on the Dunajec in 1915 foreshadowed their flexible infiltration method of 1918. In contrast, the Fourth Army tactics went, not a year forward, but half a century backward. They reverted almost to the Crimean method, the infantry being taught to advance in symmetrical well-dressed lines at a slow walk, preserving an even advance instead of probing the weak points of the defence. If it is fair to remark that these rigid infantry tactics were inspired by the idea of conforming to the artillery programme, the fact remains that by no reasonable calculation was the artillery powerful enough to be decisive. While Foch had 900 heavy guns, Haig had less than half this number for a much wider frontage. Yet, as the day approached, he seems to have grown more rather than less optimistic, despite the fact that the French had now resigned to him the major task. Whereas, during the early discussions, he had said that the corps were not to attack until their commanders were satisfied that the enemy defences had been adequately crushed, he no longer mentioned this essential condition.

In contrast, Foch's doubts had certainly grown. On April 13th he had warned Joffre that there must be an abundant supply of ammunition. "If this cannot be furnished, no military result can be attained on the Western front." A fortnight later Joffre intimated that the needs of Verdun would curtail Foch's supply, and that he must curtail his frontage. Thereupon Foch wrote: "We are a long way from that wide, powerful offensive which has in view an attainable objective and which can be kept up; and yet these are the sole conditions which permit an attack to reach a strategic result and not fade away into helplessness. After a few tactical successes at the start, we are likely to see our action halted—in other words, losses and sacrifices to no profitable end."

In the middle of May he paid a visit to Henry Wilson, whose corps was now holding the Vimy Ridge sector that had been taken over from the French. It was a strange coincidence that friend should take the place of friend on this luckless ground; the ill-omen was fulfilled barely a week later when Wilson lost ground to a German surprise attack, and thereby blotted the

otherwise blank record of his short career as a commander. During the visit Foch "expressed the view that the Allies must mobilise and organise their resources more fully, that infinitely more guns and ammunition must be turned out by France and Great Britain . . . and that then, perhaps a year hence, it might be possible to secure victory." A more personal sidelight on the visit comes from Wilson's Chief of Staff, De Pree: "On occasions like this, General Foch and Sir Henry used to be closeted together for hours, discussing, gossiping and chatting. They used to exchange caps, and in this get-up they would stride up and down the drawing-room, laughing heartily and exchanging experiences."

This clowning was a relief from foreboding. Another light on Foch's prevailing outlook was thrown by a conference near Amiens on May 29th, presided over by Poincaré and attended by the chief members of the French Government as well as by Joffre, Castelnau, Foch and Haig. The President remarked that "it was important to make sure that the generals were united in their views, as it appeared that General Foch had stated to several politicians that he was against any offensive that year." He added that Pétain and Nivelle, whom he had just seen at Verdun, had gravely warned him "Verdun will be taken," and showed an urgent desire that the Somme attack should be accelerated to relieve the pressure on Verdun.

Joffre set his face against a premature delivery of the offensive, but he gave Haig a clear hint that the French might not be able to take any part, except by reinforcing the British artillery. A few days later he informed Haig that only one French army instead of three, as originally, would take part in the attack, and that there was no question of Foch reaching the objective previously intended. This army, Fayolle's, would attack astride the Somme on a front of less than nine miles. Whereas in April Joffre had spoken of the British mission being "to co-operate in the action of the French forces," he now said that the task of the French would be "to support the British."

But while curtailing his own he did nothing to discourage Haig's ambitious aims. His attitude, if not his speech, was that, "If Haig likes to gamble, let him! He'll have to pay the piper." Joffre even urged Haig to push straight on eastwards from Bapaume, without waiting to widen the gap, and G.Q.G. sent

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Haig an "instruction" that the object of the operations was "to place a mass of manœuvre on the junctions of the enemy's lines of communication marked by Cambrai—Le Cateau—Maubeuge, etc." That the road from Bapaume to Cambrai was given as "the axis of our initial progress" showed clearly that the break-through was left to the British.

Foch shared Joffre's feeling. He was anxious to profit by anything that Haig liked to attempt, and several times sought to persuade Haig to help him more directly. At first he had suggested that the British should launch their attack several days before his own—a proposal that Haig emphatically rejected—and now he sent to G.H.Q. a criticism of Haig's plan for enlarging the gap. Instead of the British swinging north on reaching Bapaume, Foch wished them first to help him by stretching their right arm south as far as Sailly Saillisel. Haig did not even send a reply to this suggestion, although, when Joffre echoed it, he argued that the Germans might strike his own left flank meanwhile.

Haig's readiness to resent any advice or cajolery on Foch's part became increasingly obvious. When agreeing to Joffre's suggestion that the offensive should be launched "about July 1st," he had pointedly asked that no postponement should be made at the last moment "as General Foch had requested three times in 1915." His uneasiness on this score was to be justified. For, after he had put forward the date to June 25th because of a new crisis at Verdun and in the French Parliament, he was asked to postpone it until June 29th or July 1st because the French preparations were not complete. He agreed to the 29th, but no later, telling Joffre bluntly that he had hurried on his own preparations to suit the French. Five days before the attack was due he was told that Balfourier's XX Corps on his immediate right would not be ready on the 29th. Haig's anger was unconcealed, and in face of his objection to any postponement Foch did not argue the point. Then, on the 28th, when part of Haig's assaulting troops had already moved up to the trenches, the rain came down and flooded the trenches, and Haig was forced to concede to General Rain the postponement that he was inclined to withhold from General Foch.

In discussion, as on the battlefield, Foch had increasingly learnt that there were limits to the practicability of will-pressure.



Perhaps the analogy from a physical experience helped to show him its drawbacks. For in May he had a narrow escape in a motor accident on the road from Amiens to Châlons. "I was with Fournier, my son-in-law. The road was good, we were not going too fast, but a country cart in front of us suddenly stopped. The horse took fright and swerved across the road. Our driver put on the brakes, and we were flung against a tree. I went through the glass. Fournier collided with the door-frame and broke the bone in his nose. I had gashes all over my face, eyes, mouth and head. It was near a place called Plessis-something-or-other. We were taken to Meaux. My medical officer André rushed over from Amiens and sewed me up. I still bear the scars. It was on a Thursday. By Sunday I was off again, my head all bandaged up. What caused me most inconvenience was my mouth. I could no longer eat. . . ." Foch's disclaimer that he was going too fast may have been true—for once. But his general reputation was shown in the comment that Poincaré made when next they met: "I hope you will not drive so quickly after this accident."

In the opening stages of the Somme offensive he certainly did not drive his infantry forward. Wiser than their allies, they adopted the Germans' Verdun method of sending forward strong patrols to test the effect of the bombardment before the mass of the infantry were launched. The French not merely saved but profited by it.

After a week's bombardment the great assault was delivered at 7.30 a.m. on July 1st—a day of fiery heat. Thirteen British divisions, with six more close up, began to advance at a stately pace which gave the enemy time, wherever No Man's Land was wide, to bring out their machine-guns from shelter after the barrage lifted. In the furnace of their fire the dense British lines melted with tragic swiftness. Sixty thousand men fell on that one day, the heaviest day's loss in the history of the British Army. And for little result.

The attack of the four army corps on the left ended in utter failure. The two on the right captured most of the German first position, so that a fairly deep if narrow incision was made in the enemy's front.

On their right the French XX Corps gained its objective at comparatively small loss. South of the Somme, where the attack

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began two hours later, it went forward with even more ease, and by evening the enemy's second position was reached. The proportion of prisoners on this day was a good index to the proportionate success. Although Foch used only five divisions in all, these took 6,000 prisoners, whereas the British, with nearly three times the strength, captured less than a third of this number. The difference was due to a heavier artillery concentration and better adjusted infantry methods. It is true that the difference was long ascribed by British apologists to the suggested fact that the enemy were only expecting an attack on the British front. But we now know that the local German Army Command anticipated the French attack also, although their troops south of the Somme may have been less alert when it came.

Falkenhayn himself did not believe that the attack would come, even on the British Fourth Army front—perhaps because the preparations for it were so blatant. Even when it was launched he was still convinced, until July 5th, that it was only a feint to cover the real attack further north, and so he withheld reinforcements. The consequence was to give the assailants a real chance of developing their partial penetration into a break-through.

They did not take the chance. Here was the irony of events. If fresh divisions had been pushed through where the front had been cracked they would have found little to stop them—for several days. But although Haig had provided an alternative plan in case of complete failure—to switch his reserves north for an attack at Messines—he did not foresee the case of partial success, always the greater probability in war. This omission made adaptation slow. It was the slower, and forfeit of the opportunity surer, because of the rigid adherence of Rawlinson and Foch to the “limited” method.

Having done nothing all day to push reserves through in the sectors of least resistance, on the evening of July 1st Rawlinson merely ordered his corps “to continue the attack,” evenly along the whole front. For this purpose he placed his two left-wing corps under Gough, but the latter, for all his thrustfulness, realised the folly of throwing these two shattered corps anew against unbroken defences.

Rather belatedly, Haig decided on the 2nd to press the attack with his more successful right wing. But Rawlinson's “limited” ideas still proved an obstacle. The Fourth Army commander

once more ordered an attempt to storm the upper angle of the N at Thiepval, and although this forlorn hope was modified by Haig, the right wing was restrained from pressing on. Its inactivity in turn restrained the French corps in the narrow corridor between it and the Somme.

South of the Somme the Germans evacuated their second position, and the French gained the high ground overlooking Péronne. They might have pushed on more easily than any, but an ill-conceived order kept them marking time until there was a general advance north of the Somme. Through too pedantic fidelity to linear theory the whole Allied line of attack was, in fact, held back by its own left, embedded on the slopes of Thiepval.

When Haig overcame Rawlinson's passive resistance to the idea of uneven pressure, he met a fresh and French stumbling-block. Both Joffre and Foch were agreed in advocating the line that was strategically desirable in preference to the line that was practically possible. On the 3rd Foch went with Weygand to Beauquesne, where Joffre and Haig met for a heated discussion. Joffre insisted that Haig should capture the left end of the ridge as a preliminary to any attack on the right at Longueval. Haig's practical contention that he had not enough ammunition to cover effectively an attack on the whole front, and that the defences at Longueval were weaker than at Thiepval, made no impression on Joffre, who declared that if Haig attacked Longueval he would be beaten. Indeed, he went so far as to give Haig a direct order to follow his plan, whereupon Haig retorted that he was responsible to the British Government, and would follow his own line in questions of tactics. This settled the question.

When Wilson visited Foch two days later he heard Foch's story of this interview. "Haig showed that he was much upset by his losses . . . and that therefore he was not much inclined to attack again at Thiepval-Serre, but proposed to exploit the success further south. This infuriated Joffre, who simply went for Haig and, as Foch said, was quite *brutal*. Haig said he was not speaking as one gentleman to another, and old Joffre said he would have no further dealings with Haig over this matter, and that Haig must work it out with Foch." According to others present, however, the ferocity of the debate was somewhat exaggerated in this recital.

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Wilson added: "On the whole, then, Foch is very pleased with his own advance and displeased with ours, but does not think that Haig yet understands in what ours failed—viz., not nearly sufficient concentration of fire before infantry attack." While there was some justice in the criticism, Foch seems to have overlooked the fact that he had twice as many heavy guns for only half the British frontage.

Despite Haig's determination, there was a long interval before the right wing of the Fourth Army was ready for the attack on the German second position. And the interval was the longer because Haig deemed it necessary to nibble away all the enemy's outlying foothills before attempting his main bite.

By a curious reversal of attitude, Rawlinson now became the advocate of bolder measures. He obtained Haig's dubious sanction to try a night-advance up to the enemy's second position, followed after a mere five minutes' intense bombardment by an assault in the half-light. Originality was repaid by surprise. The attack crashed through the German second position, except on the right. But its effect was limited both by slenderness of force and by narrowness of front—a mere four divisions on a four-mile sector. The handicap was the greater because the French on the right did not take part—from lack of faith in the attempt.

After the failure to exploit this opening Haig reverted to the nibbling method, now to be exalted as a definite and masterly strategy of attrition, and to be defended by optimistic miscalculations of the German losses. Nearly two months of bitter fighting followed, during which little progress was made at much cost. The cost was, however, more evenly balanced than hitherto, through the stupidity of the German army commander, who issued an order that any officer who dared to evacuate a pulverised yard of trench would be court-martialled. Thus the infantry of both sides served as compressed cannon-fodder for artillery consumption, and as driven game for the machine "guns." At Pozières, for example, successive Australian brigades were thrown twenty times in succession against this one small point for the ultimate gain, after six weeks, of a narrow tongue of ground barely a mile deep. And with almost equal persistency the German infantry were driven to the counter-attack. Unimaginative obstinacy could be carried no further. Even the

stoutest hearts among the survivors shrivelled in the furnace. Their feeling was epitomised in one of the letters that are quoted in the Australian official history: "For Christ's sake, write a book on the life of an infantryman, and by doing so you will prevent these shocking tragedies."

While the British had forfeited opportunities, the French, on the other hand, had abstained from taking them. Foch's course of waiting upon the British left cost more in the outcome. For when increased resources allowed him to extend his offensive, the Germans had not only brought increased forces to resist him but had developed new lines of defence to replace those he had broken. Thus the belated entry into the battle of part of Micheler's Tenth Army, on the right of Fayolle's Sixth Army, did not fulfil anticipations. Micheler's left wing succeeded in biting off another slice of the enemy's first position, but Fayolle's men failed to deepen the bulge they had already made. Foch sought to loosen this hardening resistance by instructing Fayolle to make large and repeated attacks with the least possible interval, but the effect of his prescription is not historically or geographically perceptible. If the British progress between the middle of July and the end of August was slight, that of the French was scarcely measurable.

But the failure of Foch's subordinates to fulfil the orders he issued seems to have worried him less than his inability to give Haig similar instructions. On August 12th Wilson paid Foch a visit at Villers-Bretonneux: "Foch told me all his secrets. In the first place he is dissatisfied with his relations with Haig. Haig is always civil and nice, but tells him nothing, and the relationship between them is not such that Foch can converse freely with Haig and tell him all his plans and hopes and experiences. . . . Foch wanted to know how we could get back to the old happy relations, and wanted me back, but realised this was impossible. Then Foch told me of his long interview with Lloyd George, who came to see him yesterday. Lloyd George asked innumerable questions about why we took so few prisoners, why we took so little ground, why we had such heavy losses, all these in comparison with the French. Foch played up well as regards Haig and would not give him away. . . . Foch said that Lloyd George was *très monté* against Haig, and he did not think Haig's seat was very secure."

Wilson was not the only one to be told of this conversation with Lloyd George. Foch lost no time in telling Haig, also, that Lloyd George had invited him to criticise Haig's methods, which he had loyally refused to do. There is so curious a coincidence between this well-meaning breach of confidence and that of November, 1914, as to suggest that Foch hoped by it to woo Haig's confidence as he had won French's. If so, the effort was not altogether successful, though relations between the two leaders certainly became closer in September than they had been earlier.

Foch's material resources, also, became ampler, as the demands of Verdun lessened. For after the opening of the Somme offensive Falkenhayn sent no fresh divisions to Verdun, and the German offensive there died away from lack of nourishment.

Despite Haig's professed adherence to the attrition doctrine preached by Joffre, his faith seems to have been shaken after two months' trial. For on August 30th Rawlinson's diary records: "The Chief is anxious to have a gamble with all the available troops about September 15th, with the object of breaking down the German resistance and getting through to Bapaume." And it adds, illogically: "We shall have no reserves in hand, save tired troops, but success at this time . . . might bring the Boches to terms."

The attack was to pivot on the left wing, which had been formed into a separate Fifth Army under Gough. The general direction of the attack north of the Somme was now swung towards the north-east, Rawlinson's army forming the centre and Fayolle's the right wing. To give Fayolle's attack fresh weight, Foch had put in two new corps north of the Somme, and during September he added a further two. But the crowding of five army corps into so narrow a space caused a congestion that hampered movement and gave the German guns a massed target.

While Foch threw the main weight of his resources north of the Somme, he also arranged to extend his front of attack south of the Somme. And he no longer waited for Haig. In the first week of September, while Rawlinson was still battering his way forward to secure a straight starting-line for the "big push," Micheler's army broke into a further three miles of the original German front line near Chaulnes, and took 7,000 prisoners.

On the 12th Fayolle launched his general attack north of the river, and for a few hours a break-through seemed possible. But reserves were not pushed through to exploit the opportunity, perhaps because the French command was surprised by its own success. And when Fayolle's attack was renewed on the 15th, in conjunction with the British, its sting was drawn and its failure reacted adversely on the British effort. For this, Haig pledged the great asset latent in a new weapon—the tank. Its creators had repeatedly insisted that it should not be used until, with machines tested and crews trained, it could be launched in mass for a great surprise stroke. In the spring Haig had agreed with this argument. In August he suddenly changed his mind and decided to use the mere sixty then ready—to redeem the fading prospects of the Somme offensive. The protests of its creators and of the Prime Minister proved vain. Haig was immovable.

The sacrifice brought mediocre results. On the 15th the British made promising if uneven progress, and a fresh attack ten days later established them along the long-sought crest of the ridge, while Fayolle's fresh advance on Rawlinson's right combined with it to pinch out Combles. But the real result was shown in Joffre's decision, at the end of the month, not to continue the offensive on any large scale.

Both Foch and Haig, however, were unwilling to relax their efforts. Rawlinson in vain pointed out the folly, now that the crest was gained, of fighting a way down into the valley beyond. The early onset of the autumn rains reinforced his opinion. And they also reinforced the bombardment in making the ground a morass in which guns and transport were bogged while even lightly equipped infantry could barely struggle forward. That attacks thus handicapped should fail was inevitable, and by October 12th Haig seems to have realised at last the impossibility of piercing the German defences that year.

But Foch's ardour was undamped by the rain, and Joffre intervened to reinforce it anew just as Haig was tending to relax. On October 16th Joffre wrote to say that as local attacks were having such slight effect, it was "necessary to revert to the methods used at the start of the battle." He pressed Haig to make "large and deep attacks."

One impulse to this astonishingly irrational conclusion—that as the troops had failed to advance a short way they ought to

advance a long way—came from the disasters which were befalling Rumania, whose intervention in the war had given the German command a fresh and easy target. How far Joffre was also influenced by Foch's belief that the German resistance on the Somme was breaking down is uncertain. What actually broke down, under the weight of the weather, was Joffre's purpose.

Under pressure from Joffre and Foch, Haig continued to call for fresh attacks until Lord Cavan, a corps commander, asked whether it was deliberately intended to sacrifice the British right to help the French left, and pointedly added: "No one who has not visited the front can really know the state of exhaustion to which the men are reduced." As other corps commanders had less moral courage, petty and useless attacks continued until mid-November. And on the extreme left wing the falling curtain was momentarily rolled back to show a bright lining—when Gough's coup at Beaumont-Hamel cut off the corner of the original German front.

The French part of the offensive lacked any such final contrast to relieve the gloom. Its finish was as disappointing as the British beginning. And public opinion in France, exhausted by the long strain at Verdun, was as depressed at the losses as it was critical of the achievement. Despite this secondary rôle, the French losses on the Somme were almost half (actually 195,000) the British total of 412,000, a figure which in turn was not far below the total German losses against both British and French. "No more Sommes" became the nation-wide cry.

It was the more resounding because there was now a comparison that could throw back the echo. The French had taken the chance to profit by the enemy's relaxed pressure on Verdun, and, under Pétain's direction, Nivelle had prepared a local offensive which Mangin's corps would execute. On October 24th the stroke had been delivered in a thick fog, and had regained Fort Douaumont—exactly eight months after its loss—besides taking 6,000 prisoners. Naturally the dramatic nature of the coup and the sentimental nature of the site enhanced the impression on the French public.

On November 15th Joffre held a fresh inter-Allied military conference at Chantilly, and the decision was made to renew the general offensive early in February. Joffre proposed that the



French should strike on a wide front between the Somme and the Oise, while the British attacked between Bapaume and Vimy. The French Fifth Army, just west of Reims, would chime in subsequently.

Foch, with characteristic disdain for mud and human exhaustion, was eager to renew the offensive at the earliest moment. But his opinion was now increasingly discounted at G.Q.G., not merely by genuine critics, but by the ingenuously ambitious. He was spoken of "as a once great soldier who was but a shadow of his old self." Actually, it was the rising sun of Nivelles which had thrown Foch into the shadow. The ambitious hastened to bow down before it. Self-deception came easy to them, as always. They sympathetically discussed Foch's health and lamented that he had never been the same man since his motor accident—they would have heard a different opinion if they had asked his doctor. The oddities of manner which had formerly been hailed as the mark of genius were now regarded as the symptoms of dotage.

These ripples of rumour spread to political Paris, where criticism had more genuine motives. Recouly has related a conversation that he had with Viviani, then Prime Minister. When he mentioned the growing opposition to Joffre and Foch, Viviani replied: "You don't know the whole truth. Foch is much more tired and ill than people imagine; besides, what can you make of such a man. He's a mystic!"

That Foch had lost the confidence of the Government was bad, but not fatal. The *coup de grâce* came from Joffre, who was himself the chief target of political and public opinion. His star had deserted him; his neglect to safeguard Verdun in the previous winter was now generally known, and this time, in contrast to 1914, he did not acquire borrowed laurels from the counter-stroke made by a subordinate. The Government had retained him in power throughout the summer mainly as a symbol to sustain public confidence. But only in the autumn did a louder volume of criticism awaken him to the full insecurity of his position.

On November 29th there was an ominous debate in Parliament. One prominent member declared amid applause: "The name of Joffre is no longer a synonym for confidence. Prime Minister, do not link your fate with that of Chantilly!"

## FOCH

Quick as ever to cope with a personal emergency, Joffre sought to propitiate the angry gods by sacrificing Foch as his scapegoat. A day or two later one of his intimate staff was walking with him in the forest of Chantilly. Suddenly Joffre said: "It seems that Foch is really ill?" The officer, who had a privileged licence for candour, began to laugh and replied: "What, you too, General? I thought it was only the staff of General de Castelnau who believed in Foch's illness." Joffre smiled a little, but said nothing.

According to Painlevé, the Government had nothing to do with Foch's removal, which was made on the definite and reiterated demand of Joffre. We know also that early in December Joffre informed Nivelle that he would be appointed to command the Northern Group of Armies and conduct the next offensive. This obviously meant that Foch would have to vacate the post. A few days later the fateful stroke was delivered by telegram.

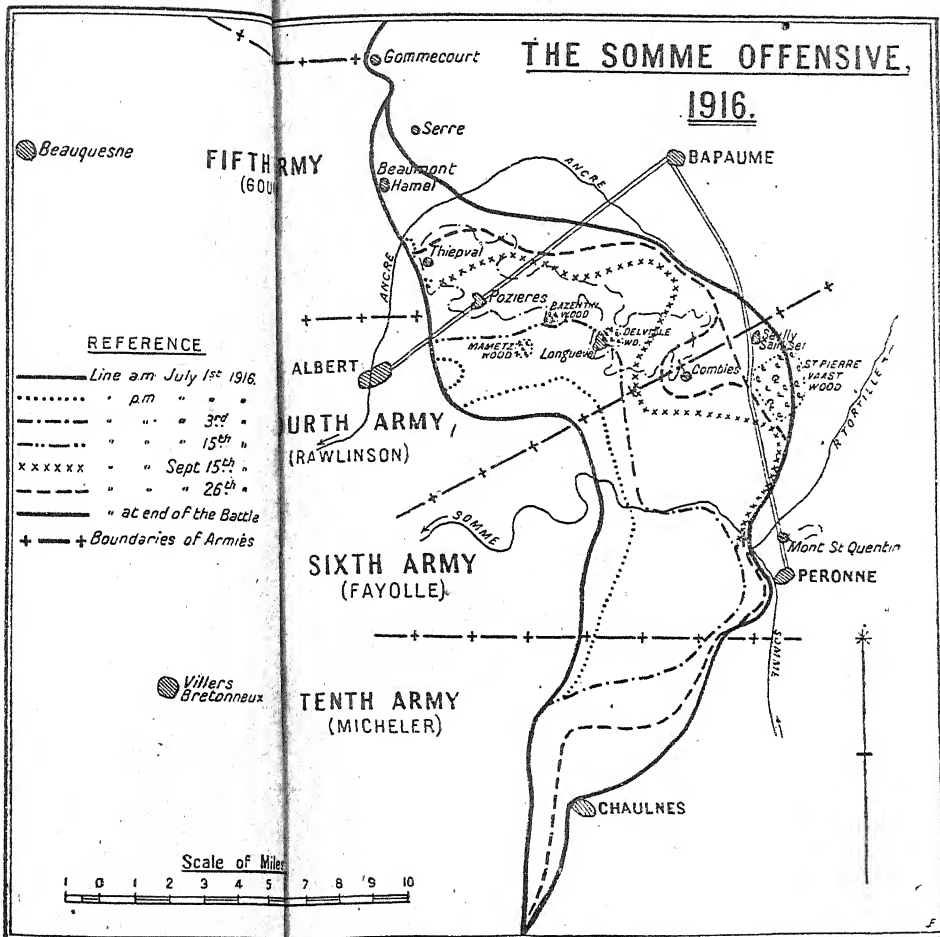
In later years Foch's laughing comment on the excuse was: "When you want to kill your dog, you begin by saying it is mad. That's a very old rule to which there are few exceptions." But there are conflicting accounts as to how he took his dismissal at the time. While some of his intimates have acclaimed his calm, uncomplaining dignity in adversity, there is a strong body of witnesses who have given different evidence. Perhaps the explanation is that the former refer to his attitude after the first shock, while the latter deal with his first reaction. It is said that he hurried to Chantilly and there made such violent protests to Joffre that his voice could be heard in the neighbouring rooms. And that in deprecatory reply, Joffre stammered: "You are *limogé*, I shall be *limogé*, we shall all be *limogé*." Like Stellenbosch in the South African War, Limoges was the centre to which had been consigned the many French generals dismissed by Joffre himself since the war began.

Clemenceau, again, has recounted how one morning he was surprised to see Foch arrive at his house in Paris, showing strong emotion. Foch told Clemenceau that Joffre had said to him: "I'm an unhappy man. I want to excuse myself for an ill-turn that I've done you. Monsieur Poincaré has sent for me and given me the order to sack you. I ought never to have agreed. I gave way. I come to ask your pardon." After reciting this



# THE SOMME OFFENSIVE,

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news Foch asked Clemenceau what he should do. Clemenceau advised him to obey without recrimination and to wait a turn of events.

The first hint of his removal seems to have come to Foch from his old friend Admiral Lacaze, who was acting Minister of War. After the war Foch admitted that he made a heated protest and confirmed that he had said: "I want to kill Boches. I want to kill Boches. If the Government wants to recall me from my command, let it do so; but it shall not say that I'm ill, for that's a lie!"

He was then asked if he would take a post out of the fighting zone, to avoid putting him under the orders of a junior. He replied: "That's immaterial to me. Leave me with the fighting troops." In post-war reminiscence he said, perhaps with some hyperbole: "To remain at the front, to avoid being sent to the rear, I would have consented to command a division, even a brigade. There can be no degradation in leading French soldiers. In my opinion, whenever a general was offered an inferior command and refused it, he did very wrong."

Foch, however, was not called upon to make such a sacrifice of dignity. Nor was he given the chance of preserving an executive rôle. Instead, a theoretical post was created in which he could exercise his talent for advice. Its creation, and Foch's nomination, was the work of Joffre, who thus eased the fall of his old assistant.

But Joffre failed to avert his own fall, although that fall was of the kind, a well-known military phenomenon, which defies the law of gravity. On December 12th he was appointed technical adviser to the Government on the general conduct of the war. While he was to keep the title of Commander-in-Chief for all fronts, Nivelle was to become "Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the North and North-East"—i.e. of the field, armies in France. Events now, however, moved fast. On December 15th, the very day that this new arrangement came into operation, a new offensive operation at Verdun regained another large slice of long-lost ground and captured 9,000 prisoners. The stroke released a gush of popular enthusiasm which submerged all chance of protest on Joffre's behalf. A few days later General Lyautey arrived from Morocco to become—for a brief time—Minister of War in the new Government. This

beneficent colonial autocrat had no intention of taking up a post where his power for good was curtailed. The new arrangement made Joffre an intermediary, even if only as a post office, between the Minister of War and the executive commander. Lyautey would have none of it. The obstacle was overcome by raising Joffre a further step in honorific ineffectiveness. He was de-moted by promotion. While stripping him of all power the grade of Marshal was revived for his consolation, and on December 27th he became the first Marshal of the Third Republic.

The rarefied atmosphere of this altitude was at once felt. When he summoned his staff to say farewell and asked who would accompany him as his orderly officers, only one volunteered, the much-abused but ever-faithful Commandant Thouzelier. Waiting without comment until the others had gone, Joffre turned to the loyal one and, with a friendly pat, exclaimed: "Poor old Joffre! Damned old Thouzelier!"

Nivelle's appointment to the Commander-in-Chief left vacant the command of the Northern Army Group. Even this new turn of the wheel of fate could not restore Foch to command. Instead it was given to Franchet d'Esperey.

But in the brief interval while Joffre had been "technical adviser" he had created a new advisory branch—to study problems of potential strategy. Nivelle was willing that Foch should preside over it, while preserving the empty title of Army Group Commander, and to this "chair" Foch was appointed on Christmas Eve.

## CHAPTER XV

### 1917—IN THE SHADOW

ALLOWED to remain in the zone of the armies, Foch chose to settle at a place of reposeful memories. During the summers of 1915 and 1916 he had installed his family in a furnished house on the outskirts of Senlis, itself on the outskirts of Paris. Thither

he had gone whenever he could snatch an interval of leisure, or there had stopped on his journeys to and from Chantilly. A man of habit, it was natural that he should now make his habitation at Senlis.

As the house was not free in this winter of his discontent, so unforeseen, he lived in the Hôtel Fautrat and used the Hôtel Bellegarde for his office. They stood in streets that bore visible witness to the enemy's aggressive manner in his first thwarted approach to Paris in 1914. Foch worked off his own exasperated feelings in a more harmless form of physical exertion—hard walking. The energy he therein revealed amply contradicted the stories of his physical decline. He had no intention of lying quietly wrapped "in the winding-sheet of purple wherein the dead gods sleep."

Senlis itself was a site of symbolism. Had not his fellow-countryman, Henry of Navarre, declared: "My hour has begun in the good town of Senlis, and since then it has extended to the whole Kingdom." At Senlis, Foch would soon emerge from the shadow, helped by his unfailing fortune and others' misfortune, and begin a time of recovery that would only end when the enemy was driven over the frontier of France.

While Senlis was to be the geographical spring of that recovery, Foch's first stay there was short. For a fortnight he worked at "Plan H," a plan to counter a possible German outflanking movement through Switzerland. On January 12th the plan was forwarded to G.Q.G., and approved by Nivelle. A few days later Castelnau, who was now Commander of the Eastern Group of Armies, left France to take part in an Allied mission to Russia. Foch was therefore sent to the Vosges to take temporary charge of Castelnau's Army Group, an interim appointment that had special justification in the fact that "Plan H" was bound up with this sector. And while Foch was there, Weygand went to Berne to discuss with the Swiss General Staff the steps to be taken if a German invasion were attempted.

But the Germans had a subtler move in contemplation, the most bloodless and yet most effective move of the war. At no cost to themselves it upset the whole Allied plan of campaign for 1917, brought France to the verge of collapse, and caused Britain to strain herself in a way that exposed her to disaster in 1918. On the allied side the loss was general; the only compensation

personal. Without this chain of ill-fortune it is unlikely that the personal fortune of Foch would have recovered.

The move itself, if in part the outcome of the Allies' Somme offensive, was the offspring of the mated minds which now ruled the German strategy. When Hindenburg and Ludendorff had succeeded to Falkenhayn's throne they had set on foot a great reorganisation of Germany's resources. Meantime they proposed to stand militarily on the defensive, although agreeing to the submarine offensive which, intended but narrowly failing to bring England to her knees, brought America into the war. And in the clear light of history we can see that only the political consequence of this naval offensive marred the effect of the military defensive. Thereby alone were the Allied armies rescued from the pit into which they had been lured—by the Germans' well-calculated withdrawal of early 1917.

How did this come about? As a "coefficient of safety" in face of the Somme offensive, Ludendorff had built a new line of defence across the chord of the great salient that bulged south-westward between Lens and Reims. At the end of January, to frustrate the expected renewal of the Allies' offensive, Ludendorff arranged a general and skilfully graduated withdrawal to this new line, christening the movement with the apt name of "Alberich"—the malicious dwarf in the Nibelung Saga. The whole of the evacuated area was utterly devastated and littered with explosive booby-traps. Although the initial stages of the retirement were begun in February at certain points, the general movement was delayed until the night of March 12th, when signs of the coming Allied offensive were unmistakable.

Confronted with a desert, the Allied pursuit was sluggish, and all the more so because the Allied commanders were slow to believe that their opponents would willingly surrender any ground. For this act of moral courage, of a type so contrary to Foch's, the German command deserves full credit. They would deserve still more if the calculation underlying it was not uncertain. Did Ludendorff at the time conceive it, not merely as a self-protective act, but as a paralysing stroke? For its effect, if not its design, was masterly. It threw out of gear the Allies' prepared offensive, depriving them of power to attack along three-quarters of their intended frontage. Only on the extreme flanks, near Arras and Reims, could and would their



offensive now be delivered. They supplied the crowning touch of comedy by claiming the German withdrawal not merely as proof of their success on the Somme, but as a fresh success!

Ludendorff's withdrawal would have limited Joffre's intended offensive even more severely than it limited Nivelle's actual plan. For while Joffre had pointedly left the main share to the British, Nivelle sought to conserve the anticipated glory for the French by extending the scale and width of the convergent attack in Champagne. Thus, whereas Joffre had intended to attack only between Reims and Craonne, Nivelle had extended the frontage of attack as far as Soissons. From a practical point of view it was an unwise change, for it involved a direct assault on the forbidding Chemin-des-Dames ridge, the now historic "hog's back" just north of the Aisne.

It is possible that if Joffre had remained in command the offensive would have cost less than did Nivelle's wild-boar rush. But there is no practical ground for supposing that it would have achieved more than merely to antedate the German withdrawal—even if the attack had been launched during February. Any incompleteness in the Germans' preparation would have been offset not only by the incompleteness of the Allies' resources, but by the state of the ground and the oft-proved power of machine-gun rearguards to delay any pursuit. Foch's post-war assertion that the war could have been won in 1917 if Joffre and he had not been removed from command was a natural self-deception. Looking back, he once again overlooked the ground beneath his feet. The more probable deduction is that, if he had not been removed from command in 1917, he would have disappeared beyond redemption below the surface of history. Instead, the links of misfortune that made up the chain of events served as a life-line for him, by which his reputation was hauled out of the slough in which it was immersed.

In a paper written on January 14th Nivelle declared: "We shall break the German front when we wish, on condition that we do not attack the strongest point and that we execute the operation by surprise and abrupt attack in twenty-four or forty-eight hours." The aim was attainable, as the Germans would show a year later. But Nivelle's plan violated all the conditions which he himself declared were necessary for its attainment. His paper was so stuffed with bombast and class-room

pedantry that it should not have deluded anyone save believers in miracles.

Pétain was not deluded, so, at a very early stage, his objections were met by removing him from any responsibility and handing over the attack in Champagne to a new reserve army group, under Micheler, composed of the three close-packed corps of Mazel, Duchesne (Foch's first Chief of Staff), and Mangin. When the German withdrawal became apparent, doubts spread. Nivelle answered them by a bland assurance that his main and narrow stroke on the Aisne did not "appear to be influenced by the German retirement." Lyautey became so uneasy that he thought of removing Nivelle, but was persuaded that such a change would be too severe a moral shock to the country. Hence he tried to reconcile Nivelle with his subordinates, Nivelle's views with their doubts—especially those of Haig, who had been placed under Nivelle's command for the forthcoming offensive. Lyautey apparently hoped that he himself would then be able to control Nivelle. But when an adverse reception in the Chamber threatened to weaken his own influence, he seized the chance to resign, bringing down the Government with him.

In the new Government, Painlevé became Minister of War. A man of acute intellect, he distrusted Nivelle's plan as much as he admired Pétain's judgment, yet felt himself caught in the web of events. To remove Nivelle on the eve of the offensive was almost impossible; it would have seemed to the world a dastardly trick against a commander who had shown his powers so signally at Verdun and had as yet done nothing to disprove his capacity for greater achievements. To retain Nivelle while countermanding his cherished offensive would have been equally difficult and utterly unwise. Hence Painlevé fell back on an attempt to induce Nivelle to modify his plan and pay heed to the objections of the executive commanders. For Painlevé had found that Franchet d'Esperey, Micheler and Pétain, the three main army group commanders, were of opinion that the German withdrawal had disrupted the plan and that a break-through was now impossible.

But Painlevé's well-meant efforts broke down before the invincible optimism of Nivelle. In him the earlier delusions of Joffre and Foch were reborn. He was certain of success, declaring that the enemy's new line was a mere bluff, that he would break their first two positions "with insignificant loss," that in

three days at most his converging armies would have joined hands in open country, and the great pursuit to the Rhine would begin.

So the offensive in Champagne was duly launched on April 16th after a long bombardment which served as a final announcement to the enemy of the attack about which they were amply informed already. By nightfall the French had advanced about six hundred yards instead of the six miles anticipated in Nivelle's programme. Everywhere the attacking troops had been trapped in the web of machine-gun fire. The Senegalese broke and fled, storming hospital trains in their anxiety to get away. That evening Nivelle reduced his effort, confining it to the sectors on either flank of the Chemin-des-Dames. After five days the only achievement was Mangin's capture of the projecting corner on the western flank; it gave the Germans a straighter line to defend! Nivelle was now led to abandon his attempt to break through, having sacrificed 120,000 men in proving himself wrong. He now proposed to revert to partial attacks on the old model; but he had lost the confidence of the army even more than of the country. His fate was justly if belatedly sealed.

To soothe the tumult and apply a brake to the offensive the Government appointed Pétain to be Chief of the French General Staff on April 28th. Fear of causing a bad impression abroad checked their desire to replace Nivelle outright. Many of the members wavered, especially when Nivelle broke his promise to resign when called on. But Painlevé stood firm; backed by the Prime Minister, he obtained on May 11th Nivelle's dismissal and replacement by Pétain. The change was too late to avert an outbreak of mutiny that spread until sixteen army corps were infected; a mutiny that was primarily due to the utter disillusionment of the fighting troops, who greeted orders for return to the line with such cries as, "We'll defend the trenches, but we won't attack."

Pétain was not long in restoring order. Confidence in his military common sense was at least as strong a restorative as the proofs he gave of his readiness to adjust petty grievances. But to restore the offensive-confidence of the troops was a harder task. If the sword of France was gradually resharpened under his superintendence, never again did it acquire the keen edge that had been so foolishly blunted. There was a tinge of irony in the fact that Nivelle's fall opened the way for Foch's return to power.

## FOCH

One of Painlevé's first acts on becoming Minister of War had been to send Foch on a mission to Italy. For his admiration of Foch's spirit was only second to his regard for Pétain's judgment. Foch's task was to discuss with Cadorna, the Italian Commander-in-Chief, how French and British reinforcements could intervene if the Italian Army suffered a dangerous attack, a contingency feared at the moment. On April 8th Foch met Cadorna at Vicenza, and carried out a combined study of the problem. The study was prophetic and the experience useful to Foch. But Nivelle does not seem to have approved of this emergency arrangement, made on the Government's initiative, for he demanded that Foch should be recalled.

By the 15th Foch was back at Senlis. Never did he find inactivity more trying. For he returned on the eve of Nivelle's offensive, the first offensive of the war in which he had taken no part. He was merely a remote spectator. With a caustic humour he likened his own rôle to that "of Jérôme Paturot in search of a social position." Another time he jestingly said before setting out for a reception: "I shan't be cold; I've put on all my orders." But he felt the chill inwardly, for he was not the man to be consoled by decorations and dignity for the loss of real power. Yet in this time of neglect his fortitude did not fail him. Weygand relates that "to measure the greatness of his soul, we must have seen him in these sad moments. To the regrets, even to the indignation, that he heard expressed around him, he contented himself with saying, 'Let them go ahead,' accompanying his words with that gesture we all knew so well and with which he dismissed everything that he did not wish to see or know."

As a spectator Foch certainly proved a more accurate judge of the situation than as a commander. For he summed up the result of Nivelle's offensive with remarkable quickness. On April 17th, the very day after it was launched, Foch received a visit from Wilson, who had been with Castelnau in Russia, and had now come back to his old task of liaison. "We had a long talk. Foch was clear that Nivelle was done, owing chiefly to the failure of the Sixth Army [Mangin]. Foch said he knew that the positions which this army was told to attack were impossible—and after what I saw yesterday I agree. He thinks on all this work Nivelle will be *degommé* and Pétain put in his place,

## FOCH

who will play a waiting game until the U.S.A. [who had declared war on April 6th] come on the scene, say a year hence. I asked about a central organisation of the Allies to really take hold, and he was all in favour of it and would love to be the French representative."

On May 6th they had a fresh talk, when Foch drove to Compiègne: "Foch came at 4.30 and spent 1½ hours with me. He is off to the Jura for a trip, and to spend his time. It is sinful that he is not C.-in-C. He is far the finest soldier in France, and in remarkably good form and health. I asked Foch whether, if Russia made peace, would the French fight it out, and he said certainly, provided the Government gave a clear lead." The mutinies that were about to develop cast a reflection on Foch's assurance.

His absence of complaint at his own neglect is the more notable because he had just suffered a fresh disappointment. Pétain's appointment to be Chief of the Staff had left vacant the command of the centre group of armies, but Fayolle, Foch's erstwhile subordinate on the Somme, had been promoted to fill the post. Painlevé, however, had not forgotten Foch. At ten o'clock on the night of May 10th Foch was summoned by Painlevé, was told that Pétain was to succeed Nivelle, and was offered the post of Chief of the General Staff in Paris. By strange coincidence Wilson had been called to Paris that same evening by an urgent telephone appeal from Nivelle, who said that he had refused to resign and begged Wilson's help in defeating the intention of making Pétain Commander-in-Chief. Nivelle, like his predecessors, seems to have had a touching faith in Wilson's power of intrigue. But this time Wilson steered a middle course. It was fortunate, for his intervention might have had the ironical consequence of thwarting Foch's return to influence.

Foch himself did not jump at the offer. Painlevé has related that "his regret at having been removed from his armies of the north was still so keen that, if he had only been guided by his own taste, he would have preferred to be put at the head of a group of armies and that General Fayolle should be appointed Chief of the General Staff." But Painlevé and Pétain, "who did his utmost to support this choice," desired Foch to take the latter post because of his prestige with the Allies, feeling that he could there serve the cause of France better than in a direct command.

Foch gave way to this wish and the appointment was made on May 15th.

He thus became the technical adviser of the Government. By his proximity no less than by his personality his influence steadily grew, imperceptibly encroaching on that of the Commander-in-Chief, more distant both in place and in manner. But it would be long ere the shifting balance of power became manifest, for Foch shared Pétain's view of the immediate situation and wholeheartedly supported his measures. "*Long, dur, sûr*" had become his favourite phrase in speaking of the war. It was only in his emphasis on the last word that the old Foch survived and the new Foch differed from his surroundings.

Over France lay a grey cloud of depression and defeatism, ominously tinged with the red light of mutiny. And the outlook abroad was full of menace. Over the narrow seas that girt Britain lay the dark pall of the German submarine blockade, now at its worst, and not for several months would the danger of collapse through starvation disperse. In Russia the outlook was dangerously bright, because bright red. That danger, unlike the others, would wax, not wane. In October the overthrow of moderate revolutionary government by the Bolsheviks would be the final and fatal stroke that deprived the Western Allies of their chief partner. Thus, while they were deprived of Russia's aid, their enemy's forces in the East would be released for use in the West.

The one gleam of light on the dark horizon was the entry of the United States into the war. That accession would have early effect in tightening the grip of the naval blockade on Germany, and also in helping to loosen the German submarine blockade on Britain. And while it ensured Germany's eventual economic collapse, so it secured the Allies' badly strained economic position, enabling them to purchase the munitions which American factories were turning out in ever-larger quantity. But, in proportion to America's bulk, the American Army was so small as to suggest the début in the battle arena of a giant armed with a penknife. Although that little army would become the frame on which a great host was raised, its influence on the situation in France was still far distant.

One of the earliest effects of the discussions between Painlevé, Pétain, and Foch was the decision to ask that America would

place a million men in France within a year. Painlevé greeted Pershing, the American Commander-in-Chief, with this request and proposal when he arrived in Paris on June 15th. And Pershing, rising to the occasion, sent a cable that staggered the War Department in Washington, still thinking of a limited liability war.

With this ultimate reinforcement as the basis of his thought, Pétain proposed to postpone any large-scale offensive until July, 1918, regarding any premature attempt as both useless and dangerous. He would remain steadfastly on the defensive until conditions were ripe for the fulfilment of his far-sighted plan, making only such local attacks as lent themselves to a certain coup at small cost. Any other policy, he considered, would hinder the delicate task of resharpening his sword.

Foch, the erstwhile spirit of the offensive, agreed with Pétain. He had shed some of his illusions. "After the shock of April 16th, to imagine that in a few months the French Army will be capable of renewing the offensive on the same scale is to have no sense of possibilities."

The new military combination set on foot a fourfold programme of munition development, embracing aircraft, heavy artillery, tanks, and gas shells. It is significant, however, that the order for 3,000 light tanks was due to the clear vision of Pétain in face of the opposition of the General Staff. They were to prove the key instrument in the great counter-stroke of July, 1918. Wilson at the same time was begging Churchill "not to bother his head about mechanical details as to the best form of tank, and rubbish of that sort."

The British leaders did not care for this plan of postponement and preparation for 1918. They viewed it as an example, not of bold vision, but short-sighted hesitation. Wilson spoke of "the Pétain school of squatting and doing nothing." Haig and Robertson were even more opposed to such a waiting strategy. Although the British offensive at Arras on April 9th had soon faded into impotence after a hopeful start, Haig persisted in fruitless assaults until early in May. Then, seeing that the French were unlikely to resume their offensive, he decided to fulfil a long-cherished plan and transfer the weight of his offensive to Flanders.

After the failure of this Flanders offensive the excuse loudly

proclaimed was that it had been delivered on French appeal to take the pressure off the French. But in fact there was no pressure on the French, and the Germans had neither the means nor the intention of taking the offensive until reserves were released by Russia's collapse. For the pretext even there is no justification. As early as May 11th Pétain intimated that he was "opposed to Haig's plans of attack," and on May 20th he told Wilson "that, in his opinion, Haig's attack towards Ostend was certain to fail, and that his effort to disengage Ostend and Zeebrugge was a hopeless one."

The offensive urge of the British had a dual source. One was, certainly, the belief of Haig and Robertson that the offensive had a probability of success; they showed an unmistakable alacrity in taking up the burden which their Allies were anxious to lay down. The other source was the pressure of the German submarine blockade. Its grip was too close for the British leaders to sit still with comfort, and under its irksome pressure reason gave way to instinct—to the instinct of doing anything rather than sitting still. Thus they convinced themselves that by counter-action on land they might loosen the pressure at sea. And thus the world had the strange spectacle, as a neutral remarked, "of the greatest sea-power making its chief effort on land, while the greatest land-power made its chief effort at sea."

Lloyd George, who had been carried to power by a cry for a more vigorous conduct of the war, was naturally anxious to justify his words. But he declared that he must first be convinced of the wisdom of an offensive, whereupon Robertson and Wilson "both drew up papers for the Prime Minister's information, advocating that course." On cooler reflection and after a talk with Foch, Lloyd George subsequently tried in vain to check the strategy he had countenanced. Haig and Robertson held on with bull-dog tenacity.

On June 2nd Wilson met Foch, who condemned the offensive plan in forceful terms. "He wanted to know who it was who wanted Haig to go on a 'duck's march through the inundations to Ostend and Zeebrugge.' He thinks the whole thing futile, fantastic, and dangerous. . . ." Foch also told Wilson "that Pétain did not particularly want" him to continue as principal liaison officer between the Allied headquarters. Wilson then mentioned a proposal that he should go as military adviser to the



British Embassy in Paris, and was hurt to find that Foch was opposed to such a step. "So he does not want me—and he really is my friend." Shaken by this mark of lost confidence in himself, Wilson quickly developed strong doubts about an offensive strategy. It is fair to add that they were confirmed by a trip he made through the French countryside and by a meeting with Clemenceau, who surprised him by saying that he "liked Pétain just because he would not attack." He also learnt from Foch that the form of help the French wanted was for Haig not to take the offensive, but to take over more of the defensive front, "as both the Army and France are tired out."

Yet on his forlorn way back to England and temporary unemployment, Wilson told Haig that he "was absolutely convinced that we should attack all we could." It is difficult to see any other motive in this "conviction" than that of ingratiating himself with a man who was obstinately set on pursuing the offensive.

On June 7th a neat preliminary stroke, as long in preparation as it was quick in execution, had cut away the small salient formed by the enemy's position on the Messines Ridge. Nearly two months passed before the main offensive from Ypres was ready, and the enemy had ample warning to prepare counter-measures. On July 31st the offensive was at last launched. The incessant bombardments broke up the drainage system and the land reverted to swamp—as experts had predicted. Repeated days of heavy rain completed the discomfiture of the attackers. After three dreadful months the offensive foundered in the swamps of Passchendaele. In proportion to its duration the vain cost had been even higher than that of the Somme offensive. If the enemy's resistance was strained, the British strength was so worn down that the effects can be traced in the collapse of the following spring.

The most apt British comment on the offensive was supplied by the man who was largely responsible for inciting Haig to persevere with it. Having quitted the dry seclusion of G.H.Q. to pay his first visit to the battlefield, when the months-long battle was ended, he burst into tears, exclaiming: "Good God, did we really send men to fight in that?" The most apt French comment came from the man of most experience in futile offensives, Foch himself: "*Boche* is bad and *boue* is bad; but *Boche* and *boue* together—Ah!"

Only when his offensive had foundered did Haig sanction the trial of a new method—the long-advocated mass of tanks method—in a new and more propitious sector. This surprise stroke at Cambrai on November 20th made a deep gash in the German front with astonishing ease and quickness. But there were no reserves to pour through the gap—they had been sunk in the cesspool of Passchendaele.

On August 6th, a week after Haig's offensive began, Foch came over to London with Ribot and Painlevé for a conference. There he took the line that the chief concern should be to prepare for the campaign of 1918 and, above all, to "hasten the creation of an American Army and its transport to France." He advocated a "simple defence of secondary fronts," but favoured a revival of the project, long buried in Kitchener's watery grave, of an expedition to Alexandretta to cut the railway life-line of the Turkish Armies in Palestine and Mesopotamia. Foch was willing to reduce the force at Salonika when Greek divisions were ready to help in its defence, but was opposed to the evacuation desired by Robertson, regarding such a step as a foolish sacrifice of the Balkan allies. He had so far shed his military scholasticism as to feel irritation at the way Robertson, like Haig and his Chief of Staff, Kiggell, harped with pedantic reiteration on the maxim of "superior forces at the decisive point." It sounded all the more unreal when employed to justify the bull-at-a-gate concentration in Flanders.

When, however, Lloyd George urged the dispatch of French and British reinforcements to Italy for a powerful combined blow against the Austrians, as Cadorna had earlier proposed, Foch was sceptical of its value, and considered that it would be too late in the season. The resolute opposition of Robertson and Haig killed the scheme. The reinforcements would eventually be sent, but to retrieve disaster, not to reinforce success. We may doubt whether such success was attainable, but there is little room for doubt that an offensive thus reinforced, if delivered in time, would have forestalled the enemy's offensive and averted its disastrous consequences.

While in London Foch naturally saw his old friend, Henry Wilson, whose widely scattered hints that he was "inclined to go in for mischief" had not yet procured him employment. Foch told Wilson much that had passed at the conference, but

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seems to have kept silence about his own chief proposal, that of creating a "permanent inter-Allied military organ" to obtain unity of action. Painlevé, well coached, had a long discussion with Lloyd George and Lord Milner on August 6th in which he urged "the nomination of General Foch as Chief of an inter-Allied General Staff." Lloyd George expressed his agreement, but remarked that in this view he and Lord Milner were "almost alone in the Government, in Parliament, as in the Army." "It was necessary to be patient, to leave him time to prepare opinion." Foch's undisguised disgust at the ineffectiveness of the conference may be traced in part to his postponement of his project. But events came to his relief.

For the moment he had a distraction in another task, that of sitting in judgment on Nivelle. In response to French Parliamentary demand, a military Commission of Enquiry into the conduct of the ill-fated offensive was appointed. Brugère was president, and the other members were Foch and Gouraud. Some of Foch's general comments were drastic. He spoke of the attempt as being "so obviously chimerical," and scornfully remarked that "the Government had sought the light, but its eyes remained closed." In taking such a line of indirect criticism he revealed the common military tendency to shift the blame to political shoulders. And when it came to passing judgment he declined to sign the president's verdict that "for the preparation as for the execution of this offensive, General Nivelle was not equal to the overwhelming task he had assumed." Foch seems to have been guided by loyalty to a fellow-soldier rather than to the truth, and the conjoint report of the commission, rendered in October, was a confused compromise between the members' disapproval of the offensive and their reluctance to disavow the soldiers who were responsible for it.

In embarrassed perplexity at the report Painlevé asked Foch what was "the practical meaning of its conclusions." With characteristic curtness Foch answered: "For Mangin, an army corps to begin with, and as soon as possible. For Nivelle, an army, but much later, much later, when he's calmed down."

The question was asked as Foch was about to leave for Italy to grapple with a more urgent problem. This was itself the outcome of a pressing danger on the enemy's side. The Austrians, feeling unable to stand the strain of resisting another Italian

offensive, had appealed to Ludendorff, who sent his slender general reserve of six divisions to strike a sudden blow at the Italians. A weak sector was chosen near Caporetto. On October 24th it was pierced by a surprise thrust delivered beneath a cloak of mist. The German blade went in so deeply as to sever vital arteries, and with dramatic swiftness the front of the Italian Second Army collapsed. His centre thus broken through, Cadorna only saved his wings by a precipitate retreat from the Venetian salient to the line of the Piave, leaving a quarter of a million men prisoners in the enemy's hand. On the map the Venetian salient between the Alps and the Adriatic has the giant outline of a clenched fist pointing to Austria; the line of the Piave forms the wrist; the possibility of holding it was complicated by the danger of an overreaching blow on the forearm from the Trentino. Fortunately for the Allies, the enemy, surprised by the astounding success of their own light thrust, lacked reserves to execute such a new blow—in force. And help to the hard-pressed Italians was on the way—from France.

Foch had risen to the emergency quicker and better than his British *vis-à-vis*. The extent of the Italian disaster became known on the 26th. After consultation with Foch, Painlevé telegraphed an offer to help that crossed Cadorna's appeal. Pétain unhesitatingly made ready four divisions. In contrast, Robertson at first demurred. A telegram was sent to Paris saying that he considered that the dispatch of troops beyond the Alps, at a moment when it was not even sure whether an Italian Army still existed, was an imprudence for which he was not willing to accept responsibility. His hand was forced by the arrival of a fresh telegram from Painlevé and Foch, which said that the French divisions were going whether the British went or not. Robertson then, with a characteristic grunt, accepted the inevitable and arranged to dispatch two divisions forthwith.

Foch here showed a more far-sighted wisdom, arguing that: "It is indisputable that General Cadorna has all that is necessary in the way of munitions, troops, and lines of resistance for stopping the enemy. . . . But events are more powerful than arguments. It is to the Allies' interests to prevent the Italian disaster from growing larger at any cost. They must, therefore, without any delay, support the Italian Army both morally and materially."



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Foch himself left Paris by train on the 28th, and early on the 30th met Cadorna at Treviso. He learnt that the Italian Armies were already falling back behind the Tagliamento, and would probably have to continue their retreat to the Piave. The possibility of holding even this line would soon become precarious. In such confused conditions Foch was loth to push the French reinforcements into "the *mêlée*," especially when he learnt that there were signs of an Austrian descent from the Trentino on the Italian rear. To guard against this danger Foch arranged to detrain the French reinforcements at Brescia and Verona instead of further forward.

Meantime, as at Ypres in 1914, he characteristically sought to stiffen the Italian resistance by phrases and gesture. The pride of the Italians, not so used to his ways as the British and Belgians, was bruised by his whirlwind manner. Perhaps there was some lack of tact in his reported exhortation to Cadorna: "It is not with water lines that you will defend Italy, but with the breasts of your soldiers." And the King of Italy, like the King of Belgium earlier, might well feel hurt when his assertion that he would fight to the bitter end, even if his armies had to retreat to Sicily, was met by the curt reply: "There is no question of retreating to Sicily; it's on the Piave that we've got to resist." Again, Foch's popularity among the sensitive Italians was not increased when another of his comments was bruited: "The Italian front was a wall; not of stone, however, but of clay, and when it began to rain——!!" The point of his parables was not always so clear.

After a brief call on the Duc d'Aosta, commanding the Third Army, Foch had gone on to Rome, where he spent several exhortatory days. Robertson, who had followed him out to Italy, had already arrived in Rome. And Robertson was the fore-runner of a greater pilgrimage to Italy, the purpose of which was helped by Robertson's departure from England.

The project of forming an inter-Allied organ of war control, so long simmering, had been brought to the boil a fortnight before Caporetto. The disaster proved a good opportunity of pouring the brew into the cup of public opinion. Painlevé left for London, to reach a final accord with Lloyd George, the day after Robertson left London. The Supreme War Council was to consist of the Prime Minister and a second Minister from each country,

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which would also supply a permanent military representative for advice and the framing of plans. One outstanding detail to be settled was the seat of the Council. The British objected to the choice of Paris; so Versailles was selected as a compromise. Another difficulty arose over the choice of the military advisers. Painlevé wished Foch to be the French representative without ceasing to be Chief of the General Staff. This did not suit Lloyd George, whose purpose was to create a strategic agent capable of overruling his own Chief of the General Staff, Robertson, whose narrowness of outlook he so much distrusted. Wilson had used his time at home to such advantage that he became Lloyd George's nominee. And with remarkable elasticity he had recanted his own ultra-Western Front faith for a wider conception adjusted to the Prime Minister's.

The discussion of this difficulty was resumed at Rapallo, whither the French and British statesmen now travelled to meet their Italian colleagues. Foch, on arrival from Rome, urged Painlevé to a fresh effort to the end that he should maintain the double function. But Lloyd George stood firm, insisting that the military representatives must preserve the power of independent judgment. He neatly turned the scales by the remark: "Personally, I should feel a real chagrin if I could not feel that General Foch is as much the adviser of the British as of the French Government." Hence on the 7th the Pact of Rapallo was signed, and the Supreme War Council came into being.

Another result of the conference was the removal of Cadorna from command. Foch had strongly pressed this point, and proposed the Duc d'Aosta, but Diaz was the Italian choice. A man who understood the human nature of the soldier, he was to do for the Italian Army what Pétain had done for the French, to renew its spirit by inspiring confidence in his mingled sympathy and practical good sense. But his first experience was disconcerting. Foch, Weygand and Wilson arrived at Padua, the Italian headquarters, to find that the new Commander-in-Chief was not yet installed. He arrived early on the 9th, without personal staff or baggage, and after an all-night journey, to meet a triple cross-examination as to his plans and dispositions—before he had time to make any. In such trying conditions serenity of mood was not easy to achieve. Thus when Foch addressed him with his customary vigour of language, Diaz began to show resentment.

Wilson, always at his best in troubled waters, succeeded in restoring tranquillity.

Diaz assured the Allied generals of his intention to hold the line of the Piave at all costs. But it was easier said than done. The Montello and Monte Grappa sectors on his left flank were special danger-points. Wilson thought that the Italians would have to fall back, but Foch handed Diaz one of his characteristic notes in First Ypres style. A heated argument took place on the 11th. Diaz declared that the best way to ensure the retention of these sectors was for the French divisions to come forward, and read out a telegram from his Prime Minister which said that "public opinion [in Italy] is already unfavourably impressed by the fact that the Allied armies are being kept back so far from danger." Foch, however, this time did not intend to use his "mud" for filling up any walls "of clay." He refused to move his troops forward along roads encumbered with transport and fugitives. He wished to hold them ready to counter-attack in case of another break-through.

There was a fresh discussion next day. Wilson noted in his diary: "Foch and Weygand began to settle the dates of detraining my four divisions, and to their entire satisfaction they had the whole four detrained by the 19th. I refused to take part in building these 'Castles in the Air,' as I called them to Diaz, who was quite sensible. And, funnily enough, a couple of hours later Cavan sent me a wire to say his second division would not be completed till about 22nd or 23rd. I sent Foch a copy."

Wilson left for England on the 17th, but Foch remained. Next day he received from the Italian headquarters a bundle of papers which dealt with the measures to be taken if a retreat to the line of the Po and the Mincio became necessary. Foch seems to have jumped to the conclusion that this natural precaution meant a definite intention to retreat. He bombarded Diaz with vigorous protests and handed him another note, which began: "The exclusive idea that ought to animate every combatant is that of not abandoning another yard of his country's soil." For the next few days he continued his exhortations to every Italian general and Minister he met, until on the 23rd he heard and responded to the stronger call of Paris. It was over a week later before the French and British troops took over a part of the front. Both were left in peace. Thus it was solely by their own



efforts that the Italian troops, if aided by the enemy's difficulties, had held the line of the Piave and brought the invasion to a standstill. Foch had certainly applied his customary moral suasion to the Italian command. It is doubtful whether the effect was more influential than on the British at Ypres, although the irritation was greater. And while he had done his best to send troops to "putty up" the British line, he had sent none into the Italian line.

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On his return to France he found a new situation. Painlevé's Government had fallen on one of the trivial issues familiar in French politics. The Rapallo Pact, which could not show the achievement of a French command over the Allied armies, had not generated sufficient enthusiasm to offset the minor grievances which swayed votes in the Parliamentary debate. And the result was that Clemenceau, so long the ferocious critic of Governments, came to assume the reins of government.

He shows little enthusiasm for the Supreme War Council, regarding it as yet another of the committees that he abhorred, and a potential danger to French direction of the war. At first he seems to have thought of altering its composition so that both Pétain and Foch would attend in their French official capacities. This would have meant that Haig and Robertson, similarly, represented the British military element, an idea not to the taste of Lloyd George, and still less to that of Wilson, who would have been cast adrift once more just as he had found a secure anchorage.

Ultimately Clemenceau chose a subtler line. He appointed Weygand to be the French representative, while Foch remained Chief of the General Staff. The British, not unnaturally, regarded this step as designed to make the Versailles Military Committee a vocal organ of the French General Staff, which in turn Clemenceau himself would control. And their influence would be the more weakened because their representative, Wilson, was chosen with the idea not merely that he should be independent but as a rival influence to that of Robertson. During the first months of its existence the members of the Supreme War Council spent more time in pulling wires than in pulling together.

Sometimes this mutual distrust had its humorous side—and asides. One such incident bore testimony to Foch's sense of humour. The French had suggested that their shorthand writer would suffice to provide notes of the discussion for all the representatives. Wilson at once leant across the table towards the American representative, General Bliss, and said, between cupped hands, "We can't have that. We must insist on our own shorthand men." Then, turning to Foch, he asked: "Did you hear what I said?" Foch either had not, or pretended not to have, understood. Whereupon Wilson, with impish candour, said: "Well, I was telling him that we couldn't agree to that—that we don't trust you little Frenchmen for a moment." Foch burst into laughter, enjoying the joke against himself. There was always the element of a game in the inter-Allied battles of wits, and it would be a mistake historically to treat all their wrangles too seriously.

But while the Allies were manœuvring for position across the council table, the enemy were preparing a manœuvre in deadlier earnest. Since early in November the stream of German troop-trains from east to west had been steadily swelling, and more rapidly after Russia's capitulation. When the 1917 campaign began there had been a proportion of nearly three Allies to two Germans on the Western Front. By the end of January, 1918, the Germans had the preponderance. The number of their divisions had risen to 177, with 30 more to come, whereas the Allied strength had fallen to 164, excluding the 4 American divisions that had now reached France.

The full gravity of the menace was not universally appreciated, although there was a sudden fall in the temperature of British military opinion at the end of the year. It was natural that the British Cabinet should be slow in adjusting themselves to the change, after they had had such long and such recent treatment with offensive heat-rays from their military advisers. It was equally natural that they should derive reassurance from the recollection of how often their own offensives had failed despite greater superiority of force. The unfortunate consequence was that they withheld reinforcements for fear of encouraging fresh squandering of lives.

Pétain, in contrast, was as quick as he was sure in gauging the situation. He had again emphasised, in November, that the





Allies should adopt a waiting strategy until the summer of 1918, when the programme of American man-power and French munitions would be fulfilled.

The immediate problem was how he could hold on until that time. And to this end he insisted that the British should extend their frontage as far as Berry au Bac, at the eastern end of the Chemin des Dames. In proportion to the respective strengths of the British and French armies, it was not an unreasonable request. And it seems the less so in the light of our present knowledge that the German leaders were divided in opinion as to whether their blow should be made against Verdun or against the British front.

Against Pétain's arguments, strongly supported by Clemenceau, the British could only argue that they had the most vital and dangerous sector, covering the Channel ports and so close to the sea as to leave no room to swing back if the line was broken. As Haig stubbornly opposed any extension further than the Oise, Clemenceau and Lloyd George agreed, on Wilson's initiative, to refer the dispute to the Versailles Committee. Wilson joyfully confided to his diary: "This is an epoch-making decision, because it really calls Versailles into being as the supreme advisory (military) body, and as the supreme executive body also. I told the Tiger that I thought well of him and liked him, and he said he liked me too!" Wilson was still more flattered when Clemenceau declared that the Versailles Committee was really "Monsieur Wilson." Wilson would soon find that he was merely being made a cat's-paw—more exactly, a Tiger's paw.

The Versailles Committee duly arranged a compromise by which Haig was to take over approximately half of the distance in dispute between the Oise and Berry au Bac. Haig and Robertson offered strong objection. And about a week later Wilson was suddenly surprised to hear that Haig had gone direct to Pétain and arranged a settlement by which he was to extend his front only as far as Barisis, just south of the Oise. This was a noteworthy concession on Pétain's part, and one that in retrospect does honour to his spirit of helpfulness. It meant that Haig's total extension of front would only be some fourteen miles. In the light of this fact the subsequent attempt to attribute the British breakdown to the extension of the front shrivels

into absurdity. So does the argument that Haig was forced by the politicians to stretch his front beyond his resources and against his will.

This question of frontage settled, another came into the foreground of debate—that of combined action in face of the impending German blow. Once more the British provided the obstacle. As far back as November Pétain had argued that “unity of command is one of the conditions of success,” and that a supreme chief should be appointed to settle plans and control reserves. He showed a most creditable readiness to subordinate his own authority, provided that the limits of a higher control were clearly defined. In May he had advocated Foch’s appointment as Chief of the General Staff although it would inevitably limit his own power. At the end of October he had gone specially to London to assure Lloyd George of his approval of a superior inter-Allied organ and of Foch’s appointment to it. At the end of November he supported the proposal made by the American representatives, Colonel House and General Bliss, to give the Versailles Military Committee executive powers and an executive head. Against a background so darkly shaded with personal ambitions Pétain’s self-abnegation stands out in bright relief. The only shadow upon it is national, not personal—the reflection that he well knew that only a Frenchman was likely to become the executive head. And in this same certainty lies both the cause and the reasonable justification of the British opposition. It was a case of “Heads, I win; tails, you lose.”

Henry Wilson energetically fostered the proposal, which he made his own, for a central reserve. If one may grant his willingness to abnegate national claims, one cannot ascribe to him personal disinterestedness. He was much vexed when Robertson, coming over to Versailles, so far embraced the proposal as to claim that he and Foch should control the reserve. Next day, February 2nd, the Allied ministers duly created the Executive Board to control a general inter-Allied reserve. Its members were to be the original military representatives, save that Clemenceau replaced Weygand by Foch, who would, furthermore, preside over the Board. This appointment virtually made Foch generalissimo, and in his own eyes the long-sought goal seemed to have been reached. Joffre’s claims had

been canvassed as<sup>o</sup> an alternative choice, but the idea of his resurrection was summarily extinguished by Clemenceau's declaration that he would not have Joffre at any price.

Joyfully hailing the creation of the Board, Wilson that night noted in his diary: "Robertson fought to the last to be on it, but was badly beaten. I wonder will he resign?" The anticipation was realised after some days of domestic crisis in the British Cabinet. Wilson expressed his willingness to become Chief of the Imperial General Staff and let Robertson go to Versailles as his subordinate, or to remain at Versailles and be independent of Robertson. A truly double concession! The eventual decision was that Wilson became Chief of the General Staff, Robertson was put in a gilded isolation cell at home, and Rawlinson was sent to Versailles—where before long he imitated his predecessor's claim in running counter to the Chief of the General Staff!

The two main questions that the Executive Board had to settle were those of the plan for 1918 and the formation of the general reserve. The first was abstract and remained abstract. The second was concrete and became dust.

Foch's proffered solution was the one we should expect. Recognising that a German offensive was probable, he argued that "we ought to meet it by an attitude which, far from being passive, should be inspired by the determination of the Entente Armies to seize every opportunity to impose their will upon the adversary. This can only be achieved by assuming the offensive the moment it is possible." If the enemy attacked, they should "not only stop him and counter-attack in the zone of his attack," but should themselves launch offensives in other parts of the front. If the enemy did not attack, they should themselves take the initiative with attacks against limited objectives in order to "wear him down and maintain the fighting spirit of our troops." In both cases the Allies should be ready to develop "a combined offensive with decisive objectives" at the first favourable moment. When Weygand submitted Foch's plan to the Versailles Committee, on January 21st, its other members were inclined to accept Wilson's counter-argument that neither side could gain an advantage in France during 1918, and that the Allies therefore should concentrate on an effort to destroy the Turkish armies. Weygand, in the end, persuaded them to

adopt Foch's view. Foch himself then took up with Haig and Pétain his idea of an offensive antidote to the enemy's offensive. At a conference on the 24th he cited the example of 1916: "The German offensive at Verdun was stopped not by our resistance there but by our offensive on the Somme. Such an operation is only possible when foreseen and prepared beforehand." He added that, in planning it, "the entire front must be considered as a whole, not the French as one part and the British as another. The plan must envisage them preparing together for offensive action on a common battlefield."

Pétain replied that the situation was different from 1916. The Germans had sufficient force to "attack at three points simultaneously or successively, and at each point the attack can be more violent than at Verdun." "When they attack at one point, are we then to launch a counter-attack?" If so, he argued, the enemy's next stroke might find the Allies without reserves ready to meet it.

Foch then said that to prepare such a counter-offensive did not imply that one was committed to any fixed moment for its delivery. But a large-scale operation was better than local counter-attacks. To this Pétain retorted that while he agreed in principle he had not the reserves to spare for such a purpose. Haig interjected: "Give us back the troops from Salonika and we'll begin offensives."

The French and British commanders agreed that they could do no more than arrange for local counterstrokes, and that anything larger must depend on the arrival of American reserves. Pershing, who was present, thereupon took the opportunity to emphasise that the American Army must have its own front "as an independent force and would not be used merely as a reserve to be sent here and there." After stating that the arrival of American troops depended on the amount of sea-transport provided, he complained of French failures to furnish rail facilities and military equipment.

Foch, showing surprise, remarked, "None of these questions has been referred to me," whereupon Pétain interjected: "One should not wait until such things are brought to one's attention, but should look around and discover them." But such practical details, as we have seen and Pershing learnt, did not come within the orbit of Foch's thought. Analysis of the earlier years fore-



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stalls any surprise at the revelation made by Pershing in his memoirs: "Foch never seemed interested when I talked with him of our problems, and I doubt whether at the time he ever thought, knew, or cared much about our organisation or our questions of supply and transport."

If the argument about American help served no other purpose, it quenched any hope of Pétain and Haig sparing the reserves to fulfil Foch's project. Thus disappointed, he relieved his feelings by the comment: "In that case, we have only prepared palliatives to meet the enemy's offensive; we have no ample, vigorous counterstrokes ready."

He was not content to accept the rebuff, however, and he took up his proposal anew at the meeting of the Supreme War Council on February 2nd. It also made him there advocate with increased vehemence the necessity of a general reserve under an executive head. This time he gained his way and, as we have related, he was appointed to preside over the Executive Board. But it would seem that his known intention of using the general reserve for offensive purposes was a factor in leading Haig and Pétain to resist its creation. While friction with G.Q.G. had been aggravated by the way Foch's entourage had pressed his claims to supreme control, actual jealousy of Foch's growing influence appears to have been confined to some of Pétain's staff, and his own opposition to have sprung purely from a mistrust of the strategy which Foch now advocated.

Wilson meantime was playing at Versailles a war game of which he gave repeated performances to the Allied statesmen and generals. He liked one part of his staff to wear their caps turned round with the peak at the back to represent the enemy, and to help them to get into the enemy's mind. It was not the first time Wilson had believed in the magic power of a foreign head-dress. In the war game he showed to his own satisfaction, and the apparent admiration of his visitors, that the Germans would launch their attack in June—to meet inevitable repulse—on a front between La Bassée and Cambrai. When the German attack actually came, on March 21st, only its right wing would touch this sector, and then only the southern part of it. The northern part, curiously, was the one part of the whole British front which the enemy never attacked during the year. It deserves mention that Haig's Intelligence branch, with more

accuracy, anticipated the attack in March, and on the St. Quentin front, although the weight and width of the blow were underestimated. This under-estimate partly explains why Rawlinson found Haig so "full of confidence."

The Executive Board at Versailles fixed the strength of the general reserve at 30 divisions, of which 13 or 14 were to be French, 9 or 10 to be British, and 7 to be Italian. The total would thus be roughly one-seventh of the Allied forces, and the various national contingents were, in principle, to be posted within the zone of their own armies. But when, on February 6th, Foch asked the Commanders-in-Chief for their contributions, difficulties began. Haig agreed to earmark 6 divisions, only one less than his quota. Pétain made stronger objection, and when he refused to increase his quota to 8 divisions Foch gave way with the result that the resistance. Haig was a worse obstacle, and his resistance the dream creation collapsed.

He let it be known at once that he would resign rather than give up a quota of 57 divisions, many of which were still under strength for the autumn offensive. But he did not send any direct answer until nearly a month had passed. Then, on March 2nd, in answer to Foch's request for a written statement, he sent a definite refusal, saying that he had made his dispositions to meet an offensive, had assigned all his divisions accordingly, and could spare none for the general reserve. He offered, however, a general criticism of the Executive Board, its forecast, and its plan. In delivering this crushing counterstroke, he relied on strong support. For not only was he aware of Pétain's objections, and backed by Rawlinson at Versailles, but he had gained the sympathetic ear of the Tiger himself. Clemenceau had been to stay with Haig, had been impressed by his readiness to resign rather than surrender any divisions, and appreciated Haig's dislike of command by committee. But it has been suggested that his readiness to adopt Haig's view was inspired by a deeper motive, fostered by his own military cabinet—that of giving a fresh application to the Roman maxim "divide and rule."

Confronted with Haig's refusal, Foch determined to make an appeal to the Supreme War Council, which met in London on March 14th—seven days before the German blow fell. On arrival in London he also tried, unsuccessfully, to induce Wilson to give Haig an order to contribute his quota.

## FOCH

When the Council met, Foch put forward his request and Haig gave his reasons for refusing it. Lloyd George was unwilling to put any pressure on him, and a resolution was drafted that while no divisions in France should form part of the general reserve, the Allied divisions in Italy should be considered as a nucleus of it. If this saved the face of the Executive Board it also made its power a farce. Clemenceau, however, promptly accepted the resolution—without giving Foch a chance to reply. When Foch tried to protest, Clemenceau curtly said: "Be quiet. I'm the representative of France." All that Foch could do was to deliver the thrust at Clemenceau: "The question before the meeting was apparently to organize a reserve, and he pittee, but it looks as though the first time the Supreme War Council that Committee of all power to execute there advocate with in-

He left the meeting and retired to general reserve under an Ritz—not to sulk, but to draft a long answer and, as we have of protest. But, after a talk with Wilson, the Executive Board. At the end of the second day's meeting he raised the general command that his formal protest that nothing was doing Haig and German offensive, and the Executive Committee G.Q.G. had should be recorded in the minutes. Then, in a rebuff, he foreboding, he left on his journey back to Paris. Notwithstanding the war, save in the brief Nivelle interlude, had he been relegated to such a state of powerlessness.

END OF VOLUME ONE.